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LITERARY ESSAYS

III.

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

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LITERARY ESSAYS

SHAKESPEARE ONCE MORE

1868

It may be doubted whether any language be rich enough to maintain more than one truly great poet, — and whether there be more than one period, and that very short, in the life of a language, when such a phenomenon as a great poet is possible. It may be reckoned one of the rarest pieces of good-luck that ever fell to the share of a race, that (as was true of Shakespeare) its most rhythmic genius, its acutest intellect, its profoundest imagination, and its healthiest understanding should have been combined in one man, and that he should have arrived at the full development of his powers at the moment when the material in which he was to work — that wonderful composite called English, the best result of the confusion of tongues — was in its freshest perfection. The English-speaking nations should build a monument to the misguided enthusiasts of the Plain of Shinar; for, as the mixture of many bloods seems to have made them the most vigorous of modern races, so has the mingling of divers speeches given them a language which is

perhaps the noblest vehicle of poetic thought that ever existed.

Had Shakespeare been born fifty years earlier, he would have been cramped by a book-language not yet flexible enough for the demands of rhythmic emotion, not yet sufficiently popularized for the natural and familiar expression of supreme thought, not yet so rich in metaphysical phrase as to render possible that ideal representation of the great passions which is the aim and end of Art not yet subdued by practice and general consent to a definiteness of accentuation essential to ease and congruity of metrical arrangement. Had he been born fifty years later, his ripened manhood would have found itself in an England absorbed and angry with the solution of political and religious problems, from which his whole nature was averse, instead of in that Elizabethan social system, ordered and planetary in functions and degrees as the angelic hierarchy of the Areopagite, where his contemplative eye could crowd itself with various and brilliant picture, and whence his impartial brain — one lobe of which seems to have been Normanly refined and the other Saxonly sagacious — could draw its morals of courtly and worldly wisdom, its lessons of prudence and magnanimity. In estimating Shakespeare, it should never be forgotten, that, like Goethe, he was essentially observer and artist, and incapable of partisanship. The passions, actions, sentiments, whose character and results he delighted to watch and to reproduce, are those of man in society as it existed; and it no more

occurred to him to question the right of that society to exist than to criticise the divine ordination of the seasons. His business was with men as they were, not with man as he ought to be, — with the human soul as it is shaped or twisted into character by the complex experience of life, not in its abstract essence, as something to be saved or lost. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the centre of intellectual interest was rather in the other world than in this, rather in the region of thought and principle and conscience than in actual life. It was a generation in which the poet was, and felt himself, out of place. Sir Thomas Browne, our most imaginative mind since Shakespeare, found breathing-room, for a time, among the "*O altitudines!*" of religious speculation, but soon descended to occupy himself with the exactitudes of science. Jeremy Taylor, who half a century earlier would have been Fletcher's rival, compels his clipped fancy to the conventual discipline of prose, (Maid Marian turned nun,) and waters his poetic wine with doctrinal eloquence. Milton is saved from making total shipwreck of his large-utteranced genius on the desolate Noman's Land of a religious epic only by the lucky help of Satan and his colleagues, with whom, as foiled rebels and republicans, he cannot conceal his sympathy. As purely poet, Shakespeare would have come too late, had his lot fallen in that generation. In mind and temperament too exoteric for a mystic, his imagination could not have at once illustrated the influence of his epoch and escaped from it, like that of Browne; the

equilibrium of his judgment, essential to him as an artist, but equally removed from propagandism, whether as enthusiast or logician, would have unfitted him for the pulpit; and his intellectual being was too sensitive to the wonder and beauty of outward life and Nature to have found satisfaction, as Milton's could, (and perhaps only by reason of his blindness,) in a world peopled by purely imaginary figures. We might fancy him becoming a great statesman, but he lacked the social position which could have opened that career to him. What we mean when we say *Shakespeare*, is something inconceivable either during the reign of Henry the Eighth, or the Commonwealth, and which would have been impossible after the Restoration.

All favorable stars seem to have been in conjunction at his nativity. The Reformation had passed the period of its vinous fermentation, and its clarified results remained as an element of intellectual impulse and exhilaration; there were small signs yet of the acetous and putrefactive stages which were to follow in the victory and decline of Puritanism. Old forms of belief and worship still lingered, all the more touching to Fancy, perhaps, that they were homeless and attainted; the light of sceptic day was baffled by depths of forest where superstitious shapes still cowered, creatures of immemorial wonder, the raw material of Imagination. The invention of printing, without yet vulgarizing letters, had made the thought and history of the entire past contemporaneous; while a crowd of translators put every man who could read in in-

spiring contact with the select souls of all the centuries. A new world was thus opened to intellectual adventure at the very time when the keel of Columbus had turned the first daring furrow of discovery in that unmeasured ocean which still girt the known earth with a beckoning horizon of hope and conjecture, which was still fed by rivers that flowed down out of primeval silences, and still washed the shores of Dreamland. Under a wise, cultivated, and firm-handed monarch also, the national feeling of England grew rapidly more homogeneous and intense, the rather as the womanhood of the sovereign stimulated a more chivalric loyalty, — while the new religion, of which she was the defender, helped to make England morally, as it was geographically, insular to the continent of Europe. She was in a higher and more emphatic sense than now the

"Greate Queene of seasiedged isles."

If circumstances could ever make a great national poet, here were all the elements mingled at melting-heat in the alembic, and the lucky moment of projection was clearly come. If a great national poet could ever avail himself of circumstances, this was the occasion, and, fortunately, Shakespeare was equal to it. Above all, we may esteem it lucky that he found words ready to his use, original and untarnished, types of thought whose sharp edges were unworn by repeated impressions. In reading Hakluyt's Voyages, we are almost startled now and then to find that even common sailors could not tell the story of their

wanderings without rising to an almost Odyssean strain and habitually used a diction that we should be glad to buy back from desuetude at any cost. Those who look upon language only as anatomists of its structure, or who regard it as only a means of conveying abstract truth from mind to mind, as if it were so many algebraic formulæ, are apt to overlook the fact that its being alive is all that gives it poetic value. We do not mean what is technically called a living language, — the contrivance, hollow as a speaking-trumpet, by which breathing and moving bipeds, even now, sailing o'er life's solemn main, are enabled to hail each other and make known their mutual shortness of mental stores, — but one that is still hot from the hearts and brains of a people, not hardened yet, but moltenly ductile to new shapes of sharp and clear relief in the moulds of new thought. So soon as a language has become literary, so soon as there is a gap between the speech of books and that of life, the language becomes, so far as poetry is concerned, almost as dead as Latin, and (as in writing Latin verses) a mind in itself essentially original becomes in the use of such a medium of utterance unconsciously reminiscential and reflective, lunar and not solar, in expression and even in thought. For words and thoughts have a much more intimate and genetic relation, one with the other, than most men have any notion of; and it is one thing to use our mother-tongue as if it belonged to us, and another to be the puppets of an overmastering vocabulary. "Ye know not," says Ascham, "what hurt ye do to

Learning, that care not for Words, but for Matter, and so make a Divorce betwixt the Tongue and the Heart." *Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana* is the Italian proverb; and that of poets should be, *The tongue of the people in the mouth of the scholar.* I imply here no assent to the early theory, or, at any rate, practice, of Wordsworth, who confounded plebeian modes of thought with rustic forms of phrase, and then atoned for his blunder by absconding into a diction more Latinized than that of any poet of his century.

Shakespeare was doubly fortunate. Saxon by the father and Norman by the mother, he was a representative Englishman. A country boy, he learned first the rough and ready English of his rustic mates, who knew how to make nice verbs and adjectives curtsy to their needs. Going up to London, he acquired the *lingua aulica* precisely at the happiest moment, just as it was becoming, in the strictest sense of the word, *modern*, — just as it had recruited itself, by fresh impressments from the Latin and Latinized languages, with new words to express the new ideas of an enlarging intelligence which printing and translation were fast making cosmopolitan, — words which, in proportion to their novelty, and to the fact that the mother-tongue and the foreign had not yet wholly mingled, must have been used with a more exact appreciation of their meaning.[1] It was in London, and chiefly by means of the stage, that a thorough

[1] As where Ben Jonson is able to say, —

"Men may securely sin, but safely never."

amalgamation of the Saxon, Norman, and scholarly elements of English was brought about. Already, Puttenham, in his "Arte of English Poesy," declares that the practice of the capital and the country within sixty miles of it was the standard of correct diction, the *jus et norma loquendi*. Already Spenser had almost re-created English poetry, — and it is interesting to observe, that, scholar as he was, the archaic words which he was at first over-fond of introducing are often provincialisms of purely English original. Already Marlowe had brought the English unrhymed pentameter (which had hitherto justified but half its name, by being always blank and never verse) to a perfection of melody, harmony, and variety which has never been surpassed. Shakespeare, then, found a language already to a certain extent *established*, but not yet fetlocked by dictionary and grammar mongers, a versification harmonized, but which had not yet exhausted all its modulations, nor been set in the stocks by critics who deal judgment on refractory feet that will dance to Orphean measures of which their judges are insensible. That the language was established is proved by its comparative uniformity as used by the dramatists, who wrote for mixed audiences, as well as by Ben Jonson's satire upon Marston's neologisms; that it at the same time admitted foreign words to the rights of citizenship on easier terms than now is in good measure equally true. What was of greater import, no arbitrary line had been drawn between high words and low; vulgar then meant simply what was common; poe-

try had not been aliened from the people by the establishment of an Upper House of vocables, alone entitled to move in the stately ceremonials of verse, and privileged from arrest while they forever keep the promise of meaning to the ear and break it to the sense. The hot conception of the poet had no time to cool while he was debating the comparative respectability of this phrase or that; but he snatched what word his instinct prompted, and saw no indiscretion in making a king speak as his country nurse might have taught him.[1] It was Waller who first learned in France that to talk in rhyme alone comported with the state of royalty. In the time of Shakespeare, the living tongue resembled that tree which Father Huc saw in Tartary, whose leaves were languaged, — and every hidden root of thought, every subtilest fibre of feeling, was mated by new shoots and leafage of expression, fed from those unseen sources in the common earth of human nature.

The Cabalists had a notion, that whoever found out the mystic word for anything, attained to absolute mastery over that thing. The reverse of this is certainly true of poetic expression; for he who is thoroughly possessed of his thought, who imaginatively conceives an idea or image, becomes master of the word that shall most amply and fitly utter it. Heminge and Condell tell us, accordingly,

[1] "Vulgarem locutionem anpellamus eam qua infantes adsuefiunt ab adsistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt: vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus *quam sine omni regula, nutricem imitantes accepimus.*" (Dantes, *de Vulg. Eloquio*, Lib. I. cap. i.)

that there was scarce a blot in the manuscripts they received from Shakespeare; and this is the natural corollary from the fact that such an imagination as his is as unparalleled as the force, variety, and beauty of the phrase in which it embodied itself.[1] I believe that Shakespeare, like all other great poets, instinctively used the dialect which he found current, and that his words are not more wrested from their ordinary meaning than followed necessarily from the unwonted weight of thought or stress of passion they were called on to sustain. He needed not to mask familiar thoughts in the weeds of unfamiliar phraseology; for the life that was in his mind could transfuse the language of every day with an intelligent vivacity, that makes it seem lambent with fiery purpose, and at each new reading a new creation. He could say with Dante, that "no word had ever forced him to say what he would not, though he had forced many a word to say what *it* would not," — but only in the

[1] Gray, himself a painful corrector, told Nicholls that "nothing was done so well as at the first concoction," — adding, as a reason, "We think in words." Ben Jonson said, it was a pity Shakespeare had not blotted more, for that he sometimes wrote nonsense, — and cited in proof of it the verse,

"Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause."

The last four words do not appear in the passage as it now stands, and Professor Craik suggests that they were stricken out in consequence of Jonson's criticism. This is very probable; but I suspect that the pen that blotted them was in the hand of Master Heminge or his colleague. The moral confusion in the idea was surely admirably characteristic of the general who had just accomplished a successful *coup d'état*, the condemnation of which he would fancy that he read in the face of every honest man he met, and which he would therefore be forever indirectly palliating.

sense that the mighty magic of his imagination had conjured out of it its uttermost secret of power or pathos. When I say that Shakespeare used the current language of his day, I mean only that he habitually employed such language as was universally comprehensible, — that he was not run away with by the hobby of any theory as to the fitness of this or that component of English for expressing certain thoughts or feelings. That the artistic value of a choice and noble diction was quite as well understood in his day as in ours is evident from the praises bestowed by his contemporaries on Drayton, and by the epithet "well-languaged" applied to Daniel, whose poetic style is mainly as modern as that of Tennyson; but the endless absurdities about the comparative merits of Saxon and Norman-French, vented by persons incapable of distinguishing one tongue from the other, were as yet unheard of. Hasty generalizers are apt to overlook the fact, that the Saxon was never, to any great extent, a literary language. Accordingly, it held its own very well in the names of common things, but failed to answer the demands of complex ideas, derived from them. The author of "Piers Ploughman" wrote for the people, — Chaucer for the court. I open at random and count the Latin[1] words in ten verses of the "Vision" and ten of the "Romaunt of the Rose," (a translation from the French,) and find the proportion to be seven in the former to five in the latter.

[1] I use the word *Latin* here to express words derived either mediately or immediately from that language.

The organs of the Saxon have always been unwilling and stiff in learning languages. He acquired only about as many British words as we have Indian ones, and I believe that more French and Latin was introduced through the pen and the eye than through the tongue and the ear. For obvious reasons, the question is one that must be decided by reference to prose-writers, and not poets; and it is, I think, pretty well settled that more words of Latin original were brought into the language in the century between 1550 and 1650 than in the whole period before or since, — and for the simple reason, that they were absolutely needful to express new modes and combinations of thought.[1] The language has gained immensely, by the infusion, in richness of synonyme and in the power of expressing nice shades of thought and feeling, but more than all in light-footed polysyllables that trip singing to the music of verse. There are certain cases, it is true, where the vulgar Saxon word is refined, and the refined Latin vulgar, in poetry, — as in *sweat* and *perspiration;* but there are vastly more in which the Latin bears the bell. Perhaps there might be a question between the old English *again-rising* and *resurrection;* but there can be no doubt that *conscience* is better than *inwit*,

[1] The prose of Chaucer (1390) and of Sir Thomas Malory (translating from the French, 1470) is less Latinized than that of Bacon, Browne, Taylor, or Milton. The glossary to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) explains words of Teutonic and Romanic root in about equal proportions. The parallel but independent development of Scotch is not to be forgotten.

and *remorse* than *again-bite.* Should we translate the title of Wordsworth's famous ode, "Intimations of Immortality," into "Hints of Deathlessness," it would hiss like an angry gander. If, instead of Shakespeare's

> "Age cannot wither her,
> Nor custom stale her infinite variety,"

we should say, "her boundless manifoldness," the sentiment would suffer in exact proportion with the music. What homebred English could ape the high Roman fashion of such togated words as

> "The multitudinous sea incarnadine," —

where the huddling epithet implies the tempest-tossed soul of the speaker, and at the same time pictures the wallowing waste of ocean more vividly than the famous phrase of Æschylus does its rippling sunshine? Again, *sailor* is less poetical than *mariner*, as Campbell felt, when he wrote,

> "Ye mariners of England,"

and Coleridge, when he chose

> "It was an ancient mariner,"

rather than

> "It was an elderly seaman";

for it is as much the charm of poetry that it suggest a certain remoteness and strangeness as familiarity; and it is essential not only that we feel at once the meaning of the words in themselves, but also their melodic meaning in relation to each other, and to the sympathetic variety of the verse. A word once vulgarized can never be rehabilitated. We might say now a *buxom* lass, or that a cham-

bermaid was *buxom*, but we could not use the term, as Milton did, in its original sense of *bowsome*, — that is, *lithe, gracefully bending*.[1]

But the secret of force in writing lies not so much in the pedigree of nouns and adjectives and verbs, as in having something that you believe in to say, and making the parts of speech vividly conscious of it. It is when expression becomes an act of memory, instead of an unconscious necessity, that diction takes the place of warm and hearty

[1] I believe that for the last two centuries the Latin radicals of English have been more familiar and homelike to those who use them than the Teutonic. Even so accomplished a person as Professor Craik, in his *English of Shakespeare*, derives *head*, through the German *haupt*, from the Latin *caput!* I trust that its genealogy is nobler, and that it is of kin with *cælum tueri*, rather than with the Greek κεφαλή, if Suidas be right in tracing the origin of that to a word meaning *vacuity*. Mr. Craik suggests, also, that *quick* and *wicked* may be etymologically identical, *because* he fancies a relationship between *busy* and the German *böse*, though *wicked* is evidently the participial form of A. S. *wacan*, (German *weichen*,) *to bend, to yield*, meaning *one who has given way to temptation*, while *quick* seems as clearly related to *wegan*, meaning *to move*, a different word, even if radically the same. In the *London Literary Gazette* for November 13, 1858, I find an extract from Miss Millington's *Heraldry in History, Poetry, and Romance*, in which, speaking of the motto of the Prince of Wales, — *De par Houmout ich diene*, — she says: "The precise meaning of the former word [*Houmout*] has not, I think, been ascertained." The word is plainly the German *Hochmuth*, and the whole would read, *De par* (*Aus*) *Hochmuth ich diene*, — "Out of magnanimity I serve." So entirely lost is the Saxon meaning of the word *knave*, (A. S. *cnava*, German *knabe*,) that the name *navvie*, assumed by railway-laborers, has been transmogrified into *navigator*. I believe that more people could tell why the month of July was so called than could explain the origin of the names for our days of the week, and that it is oftener the Saxon than the French words in Chaucer that puzzle the modern reader.

speech. It is not safe to attribute special virtues (as Bosworth, for example, does to the Saxon) to words of whatever derivation, at least in poetry. Because Lear's "oak-cleaving thunderbolts," and "the all-dreaded thunder-stone" in "Cymbeline" are so fine, we would not give up Milton's Virgilian "fulmined over Greece," where the verb in English conveys at once the idea of flash and reverberation, but avoids that of riving and shattering. In the experiments made for casting the great bell for the Westminster Tower, it was found that the superstition which attributed the remarkable sweetness and purity of tone in certain old bells to the larger mixture of silver in their composition had no foundation in fact. It was the cunning proportion in which the ordinary metals were balanced against each other, the perfection of form, and the nice gradations of thickness, that wrought the miracle. And it is precisely so with the language of poetry. The genius of the poet will tell him what word to use (else what use in his being poet at all?); and even then, unless the proportion and form, whether of parts or whole, be all that Art requires and the most sensitive taste finds satisfaction in, he will have failed to make what shall vibrate through all its parts with a silvery unison, — in other words, a poem.

I think the component parts of English were in the latter years of Elizabeth thus exquisitely proportioned one to the other. Yet Bacon had no faith in his mother-tongue, translating the works on which his fame was to rest into what he called

"the universal language," and affirming that "English would bankrupt all our books." He was deemed a master of it, nevertheless; and it is curious that Ben Jonson applies to him in prose the same commendation which he gave to Shakespeare in verse, saying, that he "performed that in our tongue which may be compared or preferred either to *insolent Greece or haughty Rome*"; and he adds this pregnant sentence: "In short, within his view and about his time were all the wits born that could honor a language or help study. Now things daily fall: wits grow downwards, eloquence grows backwards." Ben had good reason for what he said of the wits. Not to speak of science, of Galileo and Kepler, the sixteenth century was a spendthrift of literary genius. An attack of inspiration in a family might have been looked for then as scarlet-fever would be now. Montaigne, Tasso, and Cervantes were born within fourteen years of each other; and in England, while Spenser was still delving over the *propria quæ maribus*, and Raleigh launching paper navies, Shakespeare was stretching his baby hands for the moon, and the little Bacon, chewing on his coral, had discovered that impenetrability was one quality of matter. It almost takes one's breath away to think that "Hamlet" and the "Novum Organon" were at the risk of teething and measles at the same time. But Ben was right also in thinking that eloquence had grown backwards. He lived long enough to see the language of verse become in a measure traditionary and conventional. It was becoming so,

partly from the necessary order of events, partly because the most natural and intense expression of feeling had been in so many ways satisfied and exhausted, — but chiefly because there was no man left to whom, as to Shakespeare, perfect conception gave perfection of phrase. Dante, among modern poets, his only rival in condensed force, says: "Optimis conceptionibus optima loquela conveniet; sed optimæ conceptiones non possunt esse nisi ubi scientia et ingenium est; . . . et sic non omnibus versificantibus optima loquela convenit, cum plerique sine scientiâ et ingenio versificantur." [1]

Shakespeare must have been quite as well aware of the provincialism of English as Bacon was; but he knew that great poetry, being universal in its appeal to human nature, can make any language classic, and that the men whose appreciation is immortality will mine through any dialect to get at an original soul. He had as much confidence in his home-bred speech as Bacon had want of it, and exclaims: —

> "Not marble nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

He must have been perfectly conscious of his genius, and of the great trust which he imposed upon his native tongue as the embodier and perpetuator of it. As he has avoided obscurities in his sonnets, he would do so *a fortiori* in his plays,

[1] *De Vulgari Eloquio*, Lib. II. cap. i. *ad finem*. I quote this treatise as Dante's, because the thoughts seem manifestly his; though I believe that in its present form it is an abridgment by some transcriber, who sometimes copies textually, and sometimes substitutes his own language for that of the original.

both for the purpose of immediate effect on the stage and of future appreciation. Clear thinking makes clear writing, and he who has shown himself so eminently capable of it in one case is not to be supposed to abdicate it intentionally in others. The difficult passages in the plays, then, are to be regarded either as corruptions, or else as phenomena in the natural history of Imagination, whose study will enable us to arrive at a clearer theory and better understanding of it.

While I believe that our language had two periods of culmination in poetic beauty, — one of nature, simplicity, and truth, in the ballads, which deal only with narrative and feeling, — another of Art, (or Nature as it is ideally reproduced through the imagination,) of stately amplitude, of passionate intensity and elevation, in Spenser and the greater dramatists, — and that Shakespeare made use of the latter as he found it, I by no means intend to say that he did not enrich it, or that any inferior man could have dipped the same words out of the great poet's inkstand. But he enriched it only by the natural expansion and exhilaration of which it was conscious, in yielding to the mastery of a genius that could turn and wind it like a fiery Pegasus, making it feel its life in every limb. He enriched it through that exquisite sense of music, (never approached but by Marlowe,) to which it seemed eagerly obedient, as if every word said to him,

> "*Bid me* discourse, I will enchant thine ear," —

as if every latent harmony revealed itself to him

as the gold to Brahma, when he walked over the earth where it was hidden, crying, "Here am I, Lord! do with me what thou wilt!" That he used language with that intimate possession of its meaning possible only to the most vivid thought is doubtless true; but that he wantonly strained it from its ordinary sense, that he found it too poor for his necessities, and accordingly coined new phrases, or that, from haste or carelessness, he violated any of its received proprieties, I do not believe. I have said that it was fortunate for him that he came upon an age when our language was at its best; but it was fortunate also for us, because our costliest poetic phrase is put beyond reach of decay in the gleaming precipitate in which it united itself with his thought.

That the propositions I have endeavored to establish have a direct bearing in various ways upon the qualifications of whoever undertakes to edit the works of Shakespeare will, I think, be apparent to those who consider the matter. The hold which Shakespeare has acquired and maintained upon minds so many and so various, in so many vital respects utterly unsympathetic and even incapable of sympathy with his own, is one of the most noteworthy phenomena in the history of literature. That he has had the most inadequate of editors, that, as his own Falstaff was the cause of the wit, so he has been the cause of the foolishness that was in other men, (as where Malone ventured to discourse upon his metres, and Dr. Johnson on his imagination,) must be apparent to every one, —

and also that his genius and its manifestations are so various, that there is no commentator but has been able to illustrate him from his own peculiar point of view or from the results of his own favorite studies. But to show that he was a good common lawyer, that he understood the theory of colors, that he was an accurate botanist, a master of the science of medicine, especially in its relation to mental disease, a profound metaphysician, and of great experience and insight in politics, — all these, while they may very well form the staple of separate treatises, and prove, that, whatever the extent of his learning, the range and accuracy of his knowledge were beyond precedent or later parallel, are really outside the province of an editor.

I doubt if posterity owe a greater debt to any two men living in 1623 than to the two obscure actors who in that year published the first folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. But for them, it is more than likely that such of his works as had remained to that time unprinted would have been irrecoverably lost, and among them were "Julius Cæsar," "The Tempest," and "Macbeth." But are we to believe them when they assert that they present to us the plays which they reprinted from stolen and surreptitious copies "cured and perfect of their limbs," and those which are original in their edition "absolute in their numbers as he [Shakespeare] conceived them"? Alas, we have read too many theatrical announcements, have been taught too often that the value of the promise was in an inverse ratio to the generosity of the excla-

mation-marks, too easily to believe that! Nay, we have seen numberless processions of healthy kine enter our native village unheralded save by the lusty shouts of drovers, while a wretched calf, cursed by stepdame Nature with two heads, was brought to us in a triumphal car, avant-couriered by a band of music as abnormal as itself, and announced as the greatest wonder of the age. If a double allowance of vituline brains deserve such honor, there are few commentators on Shakespeare that would have gone afoot, and the trumpets of Messieurs Heminge and Condell call up in our minds too many monstrous and deformed associations.

What, then, is the value of the first folio as an authority? For eighteen of the plays it is the only authority we have, and the only one also for four others in their complete form. It is admitted that in several instances Heminge and Condell reprinted the earlier quarto impressions with a few changes, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse; and it is most probable that copies of those editions (whether surreptitious or not) had taken the place of the original prompter's books, as being more convenient and legible. Even in these cases it is not safe to conclude that all or even any of the variations were made by the hand of Shakespeare himself. Some of the quartos were manifestly printed from copies furnished by shorthand-writers who had caught the play from the actor's lips more or less fully and more or less correctly. And where the players printed from

manuscript, is it likely to have been that of the author? The probability is small that a writer so busy as Shakespeare must have been during his productive period should have copied out their parts for the actors himself, or that one so indifferent as he seems to have been to the immediate literary fortunes of his works should have given much care to the correction of copies, if made by others. The copies exclusively in the hands of Heminge and Condell were, it is manifest, in some cases, very imperfect, whether we account for the fact by the burning of the Globe Theatre or by the necessary wear and tear of years, and (what is worthy of notice) they are plainly more defective in some parts than in others. "Measure for Measure" is an example of this, and we are not satisfied with being told that its ruggedness of verse is intentional, or that its obscurity is due to the fact that Shakespeare grew more elliptical in his style as he grew older. Profounder in thought he doubtless became; though in a mind like his, we believe that this would imply only a more absolute supremacy in expression. But, from whatever original we suppose either the quartos or the first folio to have been printed, it is more than questionable whether the proof-sheets had the advantage of any revision other than that of the printing-office. Steevens was of opinion that authors in the time of Shakespeare never read their own proof-sheets; and Mr. Spedding, in his recent edition of Bacon, comes independently to the same conclusion.[1] We may

[1] Vol. iii. p. 348, *note*. He grounds his belief, not on the mis-

be very sure that Heminge and Condell did not, as vicars, take upon themselves a disagreeable task which the author would have been too careless to assume.

Nevertheless, however strong a case may be made out against the Folio of 1623, whatever sins of omission we may lay to the charge of Heminge and Condell, or of commission to that of the printers, it remains the only text we have with any claims whatever to authenticity. It should be deferred to as authority in all cases where it does not make Shakespeare write bad sense, uncouth metre, or false grammar, of all which I believe him to have been more supremely incapable than any other man who ever wrote English. Yet I would not speak unkindly even of the blunders of the Folio. They have put bread into the mouth of many an honest editor, publisher, and printer for the last century and a half; and he who loves the comic side of human nature will find the serious notes of a *variorum* edition of Shakespeare as funny reading as the funny ones are serious. Scarce a commentator of them all, for more than a hundred

printing of words, but on the misplacing of whole paragraphs. I was struck with the same thing in the original edition of Chapman's *Biron's Conspiracy and Tragedy*. And yet, in comparing two copies of this edition, I have found corrections which only the author could have made. One of the misprints which Mr. Spedding notices affords both a hint and a warning to the conjectural emendator. In the edition of *The Advancement of Learning* printed in 1605 occurs the word *dusinesse*. In a later edition this was conjecturally changed to *business;* but the occurrence of *vertigine* in the Latin translation enables Mr. Spedding to print rightly, *dizziness*.

years, but thought, as Alphonso of Castile did of Creation, that, if he had only been at Shakespeare's elbow, he could have given valuable advice; scarce one who did not know off-hand that there was never a seaport in Bohemia, — as if Shakespeare's world were one which Mercator could have projected; scarce one but was satisfied that his ten finger-tips were a sufficient key to those astronomic wonders of poise and counterpoise, of planetary law and cometary seeming-exception, in his metres; scarce one but thought he could gauge like an ale-firkin that intuition whose edging shallows may have been sounded, but whose abysses, stretching down amid the sunless roots of Being and Consciousness, mock the plummet; scarce one but could speak with condescending approval of that prodigious intelligence so utterly without congener that our baffled language must coin an adjective to qualify it, and none is so audacious as to say Shakespearian of any other. And yet, in the midst of one's impatience, one cannot help thinking also of how much healthy mental activity this one man has been the occasion, how much good he has indirectly done to society by withdrawing men to investigations and habits of thought that secluded them from baser attractions, for how many he has enlarged the circle of study and reflection; since there is nothing in history or politics, nothing in art or science, nothing in physics or metaphysics, that is not sooner or later taxed for his illustration. This is partially true of all great minds, open and sensitive to truth and beauty through any large arc of

their circumference; but it is true in an unexampled sense of Shakespeare, the vast round of whose balanced nature seems to have been equatorial, and to have had a southward exposure and a summer sympathy at every point, so that life, society, statecraft, serve us at last but as commentaries on him, and whatever we have gathered of thought, of knowledge, and of experience, confronted with his marvellous page, shrinks to a mere foot-note, the stepping-stone to some hitherto inaccessible verse. We admire in Homer the blind placid mirror of the world's young manhood, the bard who escapes from his misfortune in poems all memory, all life and bustle, adventure and picture; we revere in Dante that compressed force of life-long passion which could make a private experience cosmopolitan in its reach and everlasting in its significance; we respect in Goethe the Aristotelian poet, wise by weariless observation, witty with intention, the stately *Geheimerrath* of a provincial court in the empire of Nature. As we study these, we seem in our limited way to penetrate into their consciousness and to measure and master their methods; but with Shakespeare it is just the other way; the more we have familiarized ourselves with the operations of our own consciousness, the more do we find, in reading him, that he has been beforehand with us, and that, while we have been vainly endeavoring to find the door of his being, he has searched every nook and cranny of our own. While other poets and dramatists embody isolated phases of character and work inward from the phe-

nomenon to the special law which it illustrates, he seems in some strange way unitary with human nature itself, and his own soul to have been the law and life-giving power of which his creations are only the phenomena. We justify or criticise the characters of other writers by our memory and experience, and pronounce them natural or unnatural; but he seems to have worked in the very stuff of which memory and experience are made, and we recognize his truth to Nature by an innate and unacquired sympathy, as if he alone possessed the secret of the "ideal form and universal mould," and embodied generic types rather than individuals. In this Cervantes alone has approached him; and Don Quixote and Sancho, like the men and women of Shakespeare, are the contemporaries of every generation, because they are not products of an artificial and transitory society, but because they are animated by the primeval and unchanging forces of that humanity which underlies and survives the forever-fickle creeds and ceremonials of the parochial corners which we who dwell in them sublimely call The World.

That Shakespeare did not edit his own works must be attributed, I suspect, to his premature death. That he should not have intended it is inconceivable. That he should never have carried out his intention seems natural enough, if we consider that he alone could measure, and doubtless had too often measured, how far they fell short of his conception. Is there not something of self-consciousness in the breaking of Prospero's wand

and burying his book, — a sort of sad prophecy, based on self-knowledge of the nature of that man who, after such thaumaturgy, could go down to Stratford and live there for years, only collecting his dividends from the Globe Theatre, lending money on mortgage, and leaning over his gate to chat and bandy quips with neighbors? His mind had entered into every phase of human life and thought, had embodied all of them in living creations; — had he found all empty, and come at last to the belief that genius and its works were as phantasmagoric as the rest, and that fame was as idle as the rumor of the pit? However this may be, his works have come down to us in a condition of manifest and admitted corruption in some portions, while in others there is an obscurity which may be attributed either to an idiosyncratic use of words and condensation of phrase, to a depth of intuition for a proper coalescence with which ordinary language is inadequate, to a concentration of passion in a focus that consumes the lighter links which bind together the clauses of a sentence or of a process of reasoning in common parlance, or to a sense of music which mingles music and meaning without essentially confounding them. We should demand for a perfect editor, then, first, a thorough glossological knowledge of the English contemporary with Shakespeare; second, enough logical acuteness of mind and metaphysical training to enable him to follow recondite processes of thought; third, such a conviction of the supremacy of his author as always to prefer his thought to any the-

ory of his own; fourth, a feeling for music, and so much knowledge of the practice of other poets as to understand that Shakespeare's versification differs from theirs as often in kind as in degree; fifth, an acquaintance with the world as well as with books; and last, what is, perhaps, of more importance than all, so great a familiarity with the working of the imaginative faculty in general, and of its peculiar operation in the mind of Shakespeare, as will prevent his thinking a passage dark with excess of light, and enable him to understand fully that the Gothic Shakespeare often superimposed upon the slender column of a single word, that seems to twist under it, but does not, — like the quaint shafts in cloisters, — a weight of meaning which the modern architects of sentences would consider wholly unjustifiable by correct principle.

Many years ago, while yet Fancy claimed that right in me which Fact has since, to my no small loss, so successfully disputed, I pleased myself with imagining the play of Hamlet published under some *alias*, and as the work of a new candidate in literature. Then I *played*, as the children say, that it came in regular course before some well-meaning doer of criticisms, who had never read the original, (no very wild assumption, as things go,) and endeavored to conceive the kind of way in which he would be likely to take it. I put myself in his place, and tried to write such a perfunctory notice as I thought would be likely, in filling his column, to satisfy his conscience. But it was a *tour de*

force quite beyond my power to execute without grimace. I could not arrive at that artistic absorption in my own conception which would enable me to be natural, and found myself, like a bad actor, continually betraying my self-consciousness by my very endeavor to hide it under caricature. The path of Nature is indeed a narrow one, and it is only the immortals that seek it, and, when they find it, do not find themselves cramped therein. My result was a dead failure, — satire instead of comedy. I could not shake off that strange accumulation which we call self, and report honestly what I saw and felt even to myself, much less to others.

Yet I have often thought, that, unless we can so far free ourselves from our own prepossessions as to be capable of bringing to a work of art some freshness of sensation, and receiving from it in turn some new surprise of sympathy and admiration, — some shock even, it may be, of instinctive distaste and repulsion, — though we may praise or blame, weighing our *pros* and *cons* in the nicest balances, sealed by proper authority, yet we shall not criticise in the highest sense. On the other hand, unless we admit certain principles as fixed beyond question, we shall be able to render no adequate judgment, but only to record our impressions, which may be valuable or not, according to the greater or less ductility of the senses on which they are made. Charles Lamb, for example, came to the old English dramatists with the feeling of a discoverer. He brought with him an alert curios-

ity, and everything was delightful simply because it was strange. Like other early adventurers, he sometimes mistook shining sand for gold; but he had the great advantage of not feeling himself responsible for the manners of the inhabitants he found there, and not thinking it needful to make them square with any Westminster Catechism of æsthetics. Best of all, he did not feel compelled to compare them with the Greeks, about whom he knew little, and cared less. He took them as he found them, described them in a few pregnant sentences, and displayed his specimens of their growth and manufacture. When he arrived at the dramatists of the Restoration, so far from being shocked, he was charmed with their pretty and unmoral ways; and what he says of them reminds us of blunt Captain Dampier, who, in his account of the island of Timor, remarks, as a matter of no consequence, that the natives "take as many wives as they can maintain, and as for religion, they have none."

Lamb had the great advantage of seeing the elder dramatists as they were; it did not lie within his province to point out what they were not. Himself a fragmentary writer, he had more sympathy with imagination where it gathers into the intense focus of passionate phrase than with that higher form of it, where it is the faculty that shapes, gives unity of design and balanced gravitation of parts. And yet it is only this higher form of it which can unimpeachably assure to any work the dignity and permanence of a classic; for it

results in that exquisite something called Style, which, like the grace of perfect breeding, everywhere pervasive and nowhere emphatic, makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness. On a lower plane we may detect it in the structure of a sentence, in the limpid expression that implies sincerity of thought; but it is only where it combines and organizes, where it eludes observation in particulars to give the rarer delight of perfection as a whole, that it belongs to art. Then it is truly ideal, the *forma mentis æterna*, not as a passive mould into which the thought is poured, but as the conceptive energy which finds all material plastic to its preconceived design. Mere vividness of expression, such as makes quotable passages, comes of the complete surrender of self to the impression, whether spiritual or sensual, of the moment. It is a quality, perhaps, in which the young poet is richer than the mature, his very inexperience making him more venturesome in those leaps of language that startle us with their rashness only to bewitch us the more with the happy ease of their accomplishment. For this there are no existing laws of rhetoric, since it is from such felicities that the rhetoricians deduce and codify their statutes. It is something which cannot be improved upon or cultivated, for it is immediate and intuitive. But this power of expression is subsidiary, and goes only a little way toward the making of a great poet. Imagination, where it is truly creative, is a faculty, and not

a quality; it looks before and after; it gives the form that makes all the parts work together harmoniously toward a given end; its seat is in the higher reason, and it is efficient only as a servant of the will. Imagination, as it is too often misunderstood, is mere fantasy, the image-making power, common to all who have the gift of dreams, or who can afford to buy it in a vulgar drug as De Quincey bought it.

The true poetic imagination is of one quality, whether it be ancient or modern, and equally subject to those laws of grace, of proportion, of design, in whose free service, and in that alone, it can become art. Those laws are something which do not

> "Alter when they alteration find,
> And bend with the remover to remove."

And they are more clearly to be deduced from the eminent examples of Greek literature than from any other source. It is the advantage of this select company of ancients that their works are defecated of all turbid mixture of contemporaneousness, and have become to us pure *literature*, our judgment and enjoyment of which cannot be vulgarized by any prejudices of time or place. This is why the study of them is fitly called a liberal education, because it emancipates the mind from every narrow provinciality whether of egotism or tradition, and is the apprenticeship that every one must serve before becoming a free brother of the guild which passes the torch of life from age to age. There would be no dispute about the advantages of that Greek culture which Schiller advocated with such

generous eloquence, if the great authors of antiquity had not been degraded from teachers of thinking to drillers in grammar, and made the ruthless pedagogues of root and inflection, instead of companions for whose society the mind must put on her highest mood. The discouraged youth too naturally transfers the epithet of *dead* from the languages to the authors that wrote in them. What concern have we with the shades of dialect in Homer or Theocritus, provided they speak the spiritual *lingua franca* that abolishes all alienage of race, and makes whatever shore of time we land on hospitable and homelike? There is much that is deciduous in books, but all that gives them a title to rank as literature in the highest sense is perennial. Their vitality is the vitality not of one or another blood or tongue, but of human nature; their truth is not topical and transitory, but of universal acceptation; and thus all great authors seem the coevals not only of each other, but of whoever reads them, growing wiser with him as he grows wise, and unlocking to him one secret after another as his own life and experience give him the key, but on no other condition. Their meaning is absolute, not conditional; it is a property of *theirs*, quite irrespective of manners or creed; for the highest culture, the development of the individual by observation, reflection, and study, leads to one result, whether in Athens or in London. The more we know of ancient literature, the more we are struck with its modernness, just as the more we study the maturer dramas of Shakespeare, the

more we feel his nearness in certain primary qualities to the antique and classical. Yet even in saying this, I tacitly make the admission that it is the Greeks who must furnish us with our standard of comparison. Their stamp is upon all the allowed measures and weights of æsthetic criticism. Nor does a consciousness of this, nor a constant reference to it, in any sense reduce us to the mere copying of a bygone excellence; for it is the test of excellence in any department of art, that it can never be bygone, and it is not mere difference from antique models, but the *way* in which that difference is shown, the direction it takes, that we are to consider in our judgment of a modern work. The model is not there to be copied merely, but that the study of it may lead us insensibly to the same processes of thought by which its purity of outline and harmony of parts were attained, and enable us to feel that strength is consistent with repose, that multiplicity is not abundance, that grace is but a more refined form of power, and that a thought is none the less profound that the limpidity of its expression allows us to measure it at a glance. To be possessed with this conviction gives us at least a determinate point of view, and enables us to appeal a case of taste to a court of final judicature, whose decisions are guided by immutable principles. When we hear of certain productions, that they are feeble in design, but masterly in parts, that they are incoherent, to be sure, but have great merits of style, we know that it cannot be true; for in the highest examples we have, the master is

revealed by his plan, by his power of making all accessories, each in its due relation, subordinate to it, and that to limit style to the rounding of a period or a distich is wholly to misapprehend its truest and highest function. Donne is full of salient verses that would take the rudest March winds of criticism with their beauty, of thoughts that first tease us like charades and then delight us with the felicity of their solution; but these have not saved him. He is exiled to the limbo of the formless and the fragmentary. To take a more recent instance, — Wordsworth had, in some respects, a deeper insight, and a more adequate utterance of it, than any man of his generation. But it was a piecemeal insight and utterance; his imagination was feminine, not masculine, receptive, and not creative. His longer poems are Egyptian sand-wastes, with here and there an oasis of exquisite greenery, a grand image, Sphinx-like, half buried in drifting commonplaces, or the solitary Pompey's Pillar of some towering thought. But what is the fate of a poet who owns the quarry, but cannot build the poem? Ere the century is out he will be nine parts dead, and immortal only in that tenth part of him which is included in a thin volume of "beauties." Already Moxon has felt the need of extracting this essential oil of him; and his memory will be kept alive, if at all, by the precious material rather than the workmanship of the vase that contains his heart. And what shall we forebode of so many modern poems, full of splendid passages, beginning everywhere and lead-

ing nowhere, reminding us of nothing so much as the amateur architect who planned his own house, and forgot the staircase that should connect one floor with another, putting it as an afterthought on the outside?

Lichtenberg says somewhere, that it was the advantage of the ancients to write before the great art of writing ill had been invented; and Shakespeare may be said to have had the good luck of coming after Spenser (to whom the debt of English poetry is incalculable) had reinvented the art of writing well. But Shakespeare arrived at a mastery in this respect which sets him above all other poets. He is not only superior in degree, but he is also different in kind. In that less purely artistic sphere of style which concerns the matter rather than the form, his charm is often unspeakable. How perfect his style is may be judged from the fact that it never curdles into mannerism, and thus absolutely eludes imitation. Though here, if anywhere, the style is the man, yet it is noticeable only, like the images of Brutus, by its absence, so thoroughly is he absorbed in his work, while he fuses thought and word indissolubly together, till all the particles cohere by the best virtue of each. With perfect truth he has said of himself that he writes

> "All one, ever the same,
> Putting invention in a noted weed,
> That every word doth almost tell his name."

And yet who has so succeeded in imitating him as to remind us of him by even so much as the gait of

a single verse?[1] Those magnificent crystallizations of feeling and phrase, basaltic masses, molten and interfused by the primal fires of passion, are not to be reproduced by the slow experiments of the laboratory striving to parody creation with artifice. Mr. Matthew Arnold seems to think that Shakespeare has damaged English poetry. I wish he had! It is true he lifted Dryden above himself in "All for Love"; but it was Dryden who said of him, by instinctive conviction rather than judgment, that within his magic circle none dared tread but he. Is he to blame for the extravagances of modern diction, which are but the reaction of the brazen age against the degeneracy of art into artifice, that has characterized the silver period in every literature? We see in them only the futile effort of misguided persons to torture out of language the secret of that inspiration which should be in themselves. We do not find the extravagances in Shakespeare himself. I never saw a line in any modern poet that reminded me of him, and will venture to assert that it is only poets of the second class that find successful imitators. And the reason seems to me a very plain one. The genius of the great poet seeks repose in the expression of itself, and finds it at last in style, which is the establishment of a perfect mutual understanding

[1] "At first sight, Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists seem to write in styles much alike; nothing so easy as to fall into that of Massinger and the others; whilst no one has ever yet produced one scene conceived and expressed in the Shakespearian idiom. I suppose it is because Shakespeare is universal, and, in fact, has no *manner*." — *Coleridge's Tabletalk*, 214.

between the worker and his material.[1] The secondary intellect, on the other hand, seeks for excitement in expression, and stimulates itself into mannerism, which is the wilful obtrusion of self, as style is its unconscious abnegation. No poet of the first class has ever left a school, because his imagination is incommunicable; while, just as surely as the thermometer tells of the neighborhood of an iceberg, you may detect the presence of a genius of the second class in any generation by the influence of his mannerism, for that, being an artificial thing, is capable of reproduction. Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, left no heirs either to the form or mode of their expression; while Milton, Sterne, and Wordsworth left behind them whole regiments uniformed with all their external characteristics. I do not mean that great poetic geniuses may not have influenced thought, (though I think it would be difficult to show how Shakespeare had done so, directly and wilfully,) but that they have not infected contemporaries or followers with mannerism. The quality in him which makes him at once so thoroughly English and so thoroughly cosmopolitan is that aeration of the understanding by the imagination which he has in common with all the greater poets, and which is the privilege of genius. The modern school, which mistakes violence for intensity, seems to catch its breath when it finds itself on the verge of natural expression, and to say to

[1] Phidias said of one of his pupils that he had an inspired thumb, because the modelling-clay yielded to its careless sweep a grace of curve which it refused to the utmost pains of others.

itself, "Good heavens! I had almost forgotten I was inspired!" But of Shakespeare we do not even suspect that he ever remembered it. He does not always speak in that intense way that flames up in Lear and Macbeth through the rifts of a soil volcanic with passion. He allows us here and there the repose of a commonplace character, the consoling distraction of a humorous one. He knows how to be equable and grand without effort, so that we forget the altitude of thought to which he has led us, because the slowly receding slope of a mountain stretching downward by ample gradations gives a less startling impression of height than to look over the edge of a ravine that makes but a wrinkle in its flank.

Shakespeare has been sometimes taxed with the barbarism of profuseness and exaggeration. But this is to measure him by a Sophoclean scale. The simplicity of the antique tragedy is by no means that of expression, but is of form merely. In the utterance of great passions, something must be indulged to the extravagance of Nature; the subdued tones to which pathos and sentiment are limited cannot express a tempest of the soul. The range between the piteous "no more but so," in which Ophelia compresses the heart-break whose compression was to make her mad, and that sublime appeal of Lear to the elements of Nature, only to be matched, if matched at all, in the "Prometheus," is a wide one, and Shakespeare is as truly simple in the one as in the other. The simplicity of poetry is not that of prose, nor its clearness that

of ready apprehension merely. To a subtle sense, a sense heightened by sympathy, those sudden fervors of phrase, gone ere one can say it lightens, that show us Macbeth groping among the complexities of thought in his conscience-clouded mind, and reveal the intricacy rather than enlighten it, while they leave the eye darkened to the literal meaning of the words, yet make their logical sequence, the grandeur of the conception, and its truth to Nature clearer than sober daylight could. There is an obscurity of mist rising from the undrained shallows of the mind, and there is the darkness of thunder-cloud gathering its electric masses with passionate intensity from the clear element of the imagination, not at random or wilfully, but by the natural processes of the creative faculty, to brood those flashes of expression that transcend rhetoric, and are only to be apprehended by the poetic instinct.

In that secondary office of imagination, where it serves the artist, not as the reason that shapes, but as the interpreter of his conceptions into words, there is a distinction to be noticed between the higher and lower mode in which it performs its function. It may be either creative or pictorial, may body forth the thought or merely image it forth. With Shakespeare, for example, imagination seems immanent in his very consciousness; with Milton, in his memory. In the one it sends, as if without knowing it, a fiery life into the verse,

> "Sei die Braut das Wort,
> Bräutigam der Geist";

in the other it elaborates a certain pomp and elevation. Accordingly, the bias of the former is toward over-intensity, of the latter toward over-diffuseness. Shakespeare's temptation is to push a willing metaphor beyond its strength, to make a passion over-inform its tenement of words; Milton cannot resist running a simile on into a fugue. One always fancies Shakespeare *in* his best verses, and Milton at the keyboard of his organ. Shakespeare's language is no longer the mere vehicle of thought, it has become part of it, its very flesh and blood. The pleasure it gives us is unmixed, direct, like that from the smell of a flower or the flavor of a fruit. Milton sets everywhere his little pitfalls of bookish association for the memory. I know that Milton's manner is very grand. It is slow, it is stately, moving as in triumphal procession, with music, with historic banners, with spoils from every time and every region, and captive epithets, like huge Sicambrians, thrust their broad shoulders between us and the thought whose pomp they decorate. But it is manner, nevertheless, as is proved by the ease with which it is parodied, by the danger it is in of degenerating into mannerism whenever it forgets itself. Fancy a parody of Shakespeare, — I do not mean of his words, but of his *tone*, for that is what distinguishes the master. You might as well try it with the Venus of Melos. In Shakespeare it is always the higher thing, the thought, the fancy, that is preëminent; it is Cæsar that draws all eyes, and not the chariot in which he rides, or the throng which is but the reverber-

ation of his supremacy. If not, how explain the charm with which he dominates in all tongues, even under the disenchantment of translation? Among the most alien races he is as solidly at home as a mountain seen from different sides by many lands, itself superbly solitary, yet the companion of all thoughts and domesticated in all imaginations.

In description Shakespeare is especially great, and in that instinct which gives the peculiar quality of any object of contemplation in a single happy word that colors the impression on the sense with the mood of the mind. Most descriptive poets seem to think that a hogshead of water caught at the spout will give us a livelier notion of a thundershower than the sullen muttering of the first big drops upon the roof. They forget that it is by suggestion, not cumulation, that profound impressions are made upon the imagination. Milton's parsimony (so rare in him) makes the success of his

> "Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
> Wept at completion of the mortal sin."

Shakespeare understood perfectly the charm of indirectness, of making his readers seem to discover for themselves what he means to show them. If he wishes to tell that the leaves of the willow are gray on the under side, he does not make it a mere fact of observation by bluntly saying so, but makes it picturesquely reveal itself to us as it might in Nature: —

> "There is a willow grows athwart the flood,
> That shows his *hoar* leaves in the glassy stream."

Where he goes to the landscape for a comparison, he does not ransack wood and field for specialties, as if he were gathering simples, but takes one image, obvious, familiar, and makes it new to us either by sympathy or contrast with his own immediate feeling. He always looked upon Nature with the eyes of the mind. Thus he can make the melancholy of autumn or the gladness of spring alike pathetic: —

> "That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
> When yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang
> Upon those boughs that shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."

Or again: —

> "From thee have I been absent in the spring,
> When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,
> Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,
> That heavy Saturn leaped and laughed with him."

But as dramatic poet, Shakespeare goes even beyond this, entering so perfectly into the consciousness of the characters he himself has created, that he sees everything through their peculiar mood, and makes every epithet, as if unconsciously, echo and reëcho it. Theseus asks Hermia, —

> "Can you endure the livery of a nun,
> For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
> To live a *barren* sister all your life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the *cold fruitless* moon?"

When Romeo must leave Juliet, the private pang of the lovers becomes a property of Nature herself, and

> "*Envious* streaks
> Do lace the *severing* clouds in yonder east."

But even more striking is the following instance from Macbeth: —

> "The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal enterance of Duncan
> Under my battlements."

Here Shakespeare, with his wonted tact, makes use of a vulgar superstition, of a type in which mortal presentiment is already embodied, to provide a common ground on which the hearer and Lady Macbeth may meet. After this prelude we are prepared to be possessed by her emotion more fully, to feel in her ears the dull tramp of the blood that seems to make the raven's croak yet hoarser than it is, and to betray the stealthy advance of the mind to its fell purpose. For Lady Macbeth hears not so much the voice of the bodeful bird as of her own premeditated murder, and we are thus made her shuddering accomplices before the fact. Every image receives the color of the mind, every word throbs with the pulse of one controlling passion. The epithet *fatal* makes us feel the implacable resolve of the speaker, and shows us that she is tampering with her conscience by putting off the crime upon the prophecy of the Weird Sisters to which she alludes. In the word *battlements*, too, not only is the fancy led up to the perch of the raven, but a hostile image takes the place of a hospitable; for men commonly speak of receiving a guest under their roof or within their doors. That this is not over-ingenuity, seeing what is not to be seen, nor meant to be seen, is clear to me from what follows. When Duncan and Banquo arrive

at the castle, their fancies, free from all suggestion of evil, call up only gracious and amiable images. The raven was but the fantastical creation of Lady Macbeth's over-wrought brain.

> "This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air
> Nimbly and sweetly doth commend itself
> Unto our gentle senses.
> This *guest* of summer,
> The *temple-haunting* martlet, doth approve
> By his *loved mansionry* that the heaven's breath
> Smells *wooingly* here; no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, or coigne of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle."

The contrast here cannot but be as intentional as it is marked. Every image is one of welcome, security, and confidence. The summer, one may well fancy, would be a very different hostess from her whom we have just seen expecting *them*. And why *temple-haunting*, unless because it suggests sanctuary? *O immaginativa, che si ne rubi delle cose di fuor*, how infinitely more precious are the inward ones thou givest in return! If all this be accident, it is at least one of those accidents of which only this man was ever capable. I divine something like it now and then in Æschylus, through the mists of a language which will not let me be sure of what I see, but nowhere else. Shakespeare, it is true, had, as I have said, as respects English, the privilege which only first-comers enjoy. The language was still fresh from those sources at too great a distance from which it becomes fit only for the service of prose. Wherever he dipped, it came up clear and sparkling, unde-

filed as yet by the drainage of literary factories, or of those dye-houses where the machine-woven fabrics of sham culture are colored up to the last desperate style of sham sentiment. Those who criticise his diction as sometimes extravagant should remember that in poetry language is something more than merely the vehicle of thought, that it is meant to convey the sentiment as much as the sense, and that, if there is a beauty of use, there is often a higher use of beauty.

What kind of culture Shakespeare had is uncertain; how much he had is disputed; that he had as much as he wanted, and of whatever kind he wanted, must be clear to whoever considers the question. Dr. Farmer has proved, in his entertaining essay, that he got everything at second-hand from translations, and that, where his translator blundered, he loyally blundered too. But Goethe, the man of widest acquirement in modern times, did precisely the same thing. In his character of poet he set as little store by useless learning as Shakespeare did. He learned to write hexameters, not from Homer, but from Voss, and Voss found them faulty; yet somehow *Hermann und Dorothea* is more readable than *Luise*. So far as all the classicism then attainable was concerned, Shakespeare got it as cheap as Goethe did, who always bought it ready-made. For such purposes of mere æsthetic nourishment Goethe always milked other minds, — if minds those ruminators and digesters of antiquity into asses' milk may be called. There were plenty of professors who were forever

assiduously browsing in vales of Enna and on Pentelican slopes among the vestiges of antiquity, slowly secreting lacteous facts, and not one of them would have raised his head from that exquisite pasturage, though Pan had made music through his pipe of reeds. Did Goethe wish to work up a Greek theme? He drove out Herr Böttiger, for example, among that fodder delicious to him for its very dryness, that sapless Arcadia of scholiasts, let him graze, ruminate, and go through all other needful processes of the antiquarian organism, then got him quietly into a corner and milked him. The product, after standing long enough, mantled over with the rich Goethean cream, from which a butter could be churned, if not precisely classic, quite as good as the ancients could have made out of the same material. But who has ever read the *Achilleis*, correct in all *un*essential particulars as it probably is?

It is impossible to conceive that a man, who, in other respects, made such booty of the world around him, whose observation of manners was so minute, and whose insight into character and motives, as if he had been one of God's spies, was so unerring that we accept it without question, as we do Nature herself, and find it more consoling to explain his confessedly immense superiority by attributing it to a happy instinct rather than to the conscientious perfecting of exceptional powers till practice made them seem to work independently of the will which still directed them, — it is impossible that such a man should not also have profited by the

converse of the cultivated and quick-witted men in whose familiar society he lived, that he should not have over and over again discussed points of criticism and art with them, that he should not have had his curiosity, so alive to everything else, excited about those ancients whom university men then, no doubt, as now, extolled without too much knowledge of what they really were, that he should not have heard too much rather than too little of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Quinctilian's *Rhetoric*, Horace's *Art of Poetry*, and the *Unities*, especially from Ben Jonson, — in short, that he who speaks of himself as

> "Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
> With what he most enjoyed contented least,"

and who meditated so profoundly on every other topic of human concern, should never have turned his thought to the principles of that art which was both the delight and business of his life, the bread-winner alike for soul and body. Was there no harvest of the ear for him whose eye had stocked its garners so full as wellnigh to forestall all after-comers? Did he who could so counsel the practisers of an art in which he never arrived at eminence, as in Hamlet's advice to the players, never take counsel with himself about that other art in which the instinct of the crowd, no less than the judgment of his rivals, awarded him an easy pre-eminence? If he had little Latin and less Greek, might he not have had enough of both for every practical purpose on this side pedantry? The most extraordinary, one might almost say contradictory,

attainments have been ascribed to him, and yet he has been supposed incapable of what was within easy reach of every boy at Westminster School. There is a knowledge that comes of sympathy as living and genetic as that which comes of mere learning is sapless and unprocreant, and for this no profound study of the languages is needed.

If Shakespeare did not know the ancients, I think they were at least as unlucky in not knowing him. But is it incredible that he may have laid hold of an edition of the Greek tragedians, *Graecè et Latinè*, and then, with such poor wits as he was master of, contrived to worry some considerable meaning out of them? There are at least one or two coincidences which, whether accidental or not, are curious, and which I do not remember to have seen noticed. In the *Electra* of Sophocles, which is almost identical in its leading motive with *Hamlet*, the Chorus consoles Electra for the supposed death of Orestes in the same commonplace way which Hamlet's uncle tries with him.

> Θνητοῦ πέφυκας πατρός, Ἠλέκτρα, φρόνει·
> Θνητὸς δ' Ὀρέστης· ὥστε μὴ λίαν στένε,
> Πᾶσιν γὰρ ἡμῖν τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν.
>
> "Your father lost a father;
> That father lost, lost his. . . .
> But to persèver
> In obstinate condolement is a course
> Of impious stubbornness. . . .
> 'T is common; all that live must die."

Shakespeare expatiates somewhat more largely, but the sentiment in both cases is almost verbally identical. The resemblance is probably a chance one,

for commonplace and consolation were ever twin sisters, whom always to escape is given to no man; but it is nevertheless curious. Here is another, from the *Œdipus Coloneus:* —

Τοῖς τοι δικαίοις χὠ βραχὺς νικᾷ μέγαν,

"Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just."

Hamlet's "prophetic soul" may be matched with the πρόμαντις θυμός of Peleus, (Eurip. Androm. 1075,) and his "sea of troubles," with the κακῶν πέλαγος of Theseus in the *Hippolytus*, or of the Chorus in the *Hercules Furens*. And, for manner and tone, compare the speeches of Pheres in the *Alcestis*, and Jocasta in the *Phœnissæ*, with those of Claudio in *Measure for Measure*, and Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*.

The Greek dramatists were somewhat fond of a trick of words in which there is a reduplication of sense as well as of assonance, as in the *Electra:* —

Ἄλεκτρα γηράσκουσαν ἀνυμέναιά τε.

So Shakespeare: —

"Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled";

and Milton after him, or, more likely, after the Greek: —

"Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved." [1]

I mention these trifles, in passing, because they

[1] The best instance I remember is in the *Frogs*, where Bacchus pleads his inexperience at the oar, and says he is

ἄπειρος, ἀθαλάττωτος, ἀσαλαμίνιος,

which might be rendered,

Unskilled, unsea-soned, and un-Salamised.

have interested me, and therefore may interest others. I lay no stress upon them, for, if once the conductors of Shakespeare's intelligence had been put in connection with those Attic brains, he would have reproduced their message in a form of his own. They would have inspired, and not enslaved him. His resemblance to them is that of consanguinity, more striking in expression than in mere resemblance of feature. The likeness between the Clytemnestra — γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ — of Æschylus and the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare was too remarkable to have escaped notice. That between the two poets in their choice of epithets is as great, though more difficult of proof. Yet I think an attentive student of Shakespeare cannot fail to be reminded of something familiar to him in such phrases as "flame-eyed fire," "flax-winged ships," "star-neighboring peaks," the rock Salmydessus,

> "Rude jaw of the sea,
> Harsh hostess of the seaman, step-mother
> Of ships,"

and the beacon with its "*speaking eye* of fire." Surely there is more than a verbal, there is a genuine, similarity between the ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα and "the unnumbered beach" and "multitudinous sea." Æschylus, it seems to me, is willing, just as Shakespeare is, to risk the prosperity of a verse upon a lucky throw of words, which may come up the sices of hardy metaphor or the ambsace of conceit. There is such a difference between far-reaching and far-fetching! Poetry, to be sure, is

always that daring one step beyond, which brings the right man to fortune, but leaves the wrong one in the ditch, and its law is, Be bold once and again, yet be not over-bold. It is true, also, that masters of language are a little apt to play with it. But whatever fault may be found with Shakespeare in this respect will touch a tender spot in Æschylus also. Does he sometimes overload a word, so that the language not merely, as Dryden says, bends under him, but fairly gives way, and lets the reader's mind down with the shock as of a false step in taste? He has nothing worse than πέλαγος ἀνθοῦν νεκροῖς. A criticism, shallow in human nature, however deep in Campbell's Rhetoric, has blamed him for making persons, under great excitement of sorrow, or whatever other emotion, parenthesize some trifling play upon words in the very height of their passion. Those who make such criticisms have either never felt a passion or seen one in action, or else they forget the exaltation of sensibility during such crises, so that the attention, whether of the senses or the mind, is arrested for the moment by what would be overlooked in ordinary moods. The more forceful the current, the more sharp the ripple from any alien substance interposed. A passion that looks forward, like revenge or lust or greed, goes right to its end, and is straightforward in its expression; but a tragic passion, which is in its nature unavailing, like disappointment, regret of the inevitable, or remorse, is reflective, and liable to be continually diverted by the suggestions of fancy. The one is a concentration of the will,

which intensifies the character and the phrase that expresses it; in the other, the will is helpless, and, as in insanity, while the flow of the mind sets imperatively in one direction, it is liable to almost ludicrous interruptions and diversions upon the most trivial hint of involuntary association. I am ready to grant that Shakespeare sometimes allows his characters to spend time, that might be better employed, in carving some cherry-stone of a quibble; [1] that he is sometimes tempted away from the natural by the quaint; that he sometimes forces a partial, even a verbal, analogy between the abstract thought and the sensual image into an absolute identity, giving us a kind of serious pun. In a pun our pleasure arises from a gap in the logical nexus too wide for the reason, but which the ear can bridge in an instant. "Is that your own hare, or a wig?" The fancy is yet more tickled where logic is treated with a mock ceremonial of respect.

> "His head was turned, *and so* he chewed
> His pigtail till he died."

Now when this kind of thing is done in earnest, the result is one of those ill-distributed syllogisms which in rhetoric are called conceits.

> "Hard was the hand that struck the blow,
> Soft was the heart that bled."

I have seen this passage from Warner cited for its

[1] So Euripides (copied by Theocritus, Id. xxvii.): —

Πενθεὺς δ' ὅπως μὴ πένθος εἰσοίσει δόμοις. (*Bacchæ*, 363.)
Ἐσωφρόνησεν οὐκ ἔχουσα σωφρονεῖν. (*Hippol.*, 1037.)

So Calderon: "Y apenas llega, cuando llega á penas."

beauty, though I should have thought nothing could be worse, had I not seen General Morris's

> "Her heart and morning broke together
> In tears."

Of course, I would not rank with these Gloucester's

> "What! will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
> Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted";

though as mere rhetoric it belongs to the same class.[1] It might be defended as a bit of ghastly humor characteristic of the speaker. But at any rate it is not without precedent in the two greater Greek tragedians. In a chorus of the *Seven against Thebes* we have: —

> ἐν δὲ γαίᾳ
> Ζόα φονορύτῳ
> Μέμικται· καρτα δ' εἴσ' δμαιμοι.

And does not Sophocles make Ajax in his despair quibble upon his own name quite in the Shakespearian fashion, under similar circumstances? Nor does the coarseness with which our great poet is reproached lack an Æschylean parallel. Even the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* would have found a true gossip in her of the *Agamemnon*, who is so indiscreet in her confidences concerning the nursery life of Orestes. Whether Raleigh is right or not in warning historians against following truth too close upon the heels, the caution is a good one for

[1] I have taken the first passage in point that occurred to my memory. It may not be Shakespeare's, though probably his. The question of authorship is, I think, settled, so far as criticism can do it, in Mr. Grant White's admirable essay appended to the Second Part of Henry VI.

poets as respects truth to Nature. But it is a mischievous fallacy in historian or critic to treat as a blemish of the man what is but the common tincture of his age. It is to confound a spatter of mud with a moral stain.

But I have been led away from my immediate purpose. I did not intend to compare Shakespeare with the ancients, much less to justify his defects by theirs. Shakespeare himself has left us a pregnant satire on dogmatical and categorical æsthetics (which commonly in discussion soon lose their ceremonious tails and are reduced to the internecine dog and cat of their bald first syllables) in the cloud-scene between Hamlet and Polonius, suggesting exquisitely how futile is any attempt at a cast-iron definition of those perpetually metamorphic impressions of the beautiful whose source is as much in the man who looks as in the thing he sees. In the fine arts a thing is either good in itself or it is nothing. It neither gains nor loses by having it shown that another good thing was also good in itself, any more than a bad thing profits by comparison with another that is worse. The final judgment of the world is intuitive, and is based, not on proof that a work possesses some of the qualities of another whose greatness is acknowledged, but on the immediate feeling that it carries to a high point of perfection certain qualities proper to itself. One does not flatter a fine pear by comparing it to a fine peach, nor learn what a fine peach is by tasting ever so many poor ones. The boy who makes his first bite into one does not

need to ask his father if or how or why it is good. Because continuity is a merit in some kinds of writing, shall we refuse ourselves to the authentic charm of Montaigne's want of it? I have heard people complain of French tragedies because they were so very French. This, though it may not be to some particular tastes, and may from one point of view be a defect, is from another and far higher a distinguished merit. It is their flavor, as direct a telltale of the soil whence they drew it as that of French wines is. Suppose we should tax the Elgin marbles with being too Greek? When will people, nay, when will even critics, get over this self-defrauding trick of cheapening the excellence of one thing by that of another, this conclusive style of judgment which consists simply in belonging to the other parish? As one grows older, one loses many idols, perhaps comes at last to have none at all, though one may honestly enough uncover in deference to the worshippers before any shrine. But for the seeming loss the compensation is ample. These saints of literature descend from their canopied remoteness to be even more precious as men like ourselves, our companions in field and street, speaking the same tongue, though in many dialects, and owning one creed under the most diverse masks of form.

Much of that merit of structure which is claimed for the ancient tragedy is due, if I am not mistaken, to circumstances external to the drama itself, — to custom, to convention, to the exigencies of the theatre. It is formal rather than organic. The *Pro-*

metheus seems to me one of the few Greek tragedies in which the whole creation has developed itself in perfect proportion from one central germ of living conception. The motive of the ancient drama is generally outside of it, while in the modern (at least in the English) it is necessarily within. Goethe, in a thoughtful essay,[1] written many years later than his famous criticism of Hamlet in *Wilhelm Meister*, says that the distinction between the two is the difference between *sollen* and *wollen*, that is, between *must* and *would*. He means that in the Greek drama the catastrophe is foreordained by an inexorable Destiny, while the element of Freewill, and consequently of choice, is the very axis of the modern. The definition is conveniently portable, but it has its limitations. Goethe's attention was too exclusively fixed on the Fate tragedies of the Greeks, and upon Shakespeare among the moderns. In the Spanish drama, for example, custom, loyalty, honor, and religion are as imperative and as inevitable as doom. In the *Antigone*, on the other hand, the crisis lies in the character of the protagonist. In this sense it is modern, and is the first example of true character-painting in tragedy. But, from whatever cause, that exquisite analysis of complex motives, and the display of them in action and speech, which constitute for us the abiding charm of fiction, were quite unknown to the ancients. They reached their height in Cervantes and Shakespeare, and, though on a lower plane, still belong to the upper region of art in Le

[1] *Shakspeare und kein Ende.*

Sage, Molière, and Fielding. The personages of the Greek tragedy seem to be commonly rather types than individuals. In the modern tragedy, certainly in the four greatest of Shakespeare's tragedies, there is still something very like Destiny, only the place of it is changed. It is no longer above man, but in him; yet the catastrophe is as sternly foredoomed in the characters of Lear, Othello, Macbeth, and Hamlet as it could be by an infallible oracle. In Macbeth, indeed, the Weird Sisters introduce an element very like Fate; but generally it may be said that with the Greeks the character is involved in the action, while with Shakespeare the action is evolved from the character. In the one case, the motive of the play controls the personages; in the other, the chief personages are in themselves the motive to which all else is subsidiary. In any comparison, therefore, of Shakespeare with the ancients, we are not to contrast him with them as unapproachable models, but to consider whether he, like them, did not consciously endeavor, under the circumstances and limitations in which he found himself, to produce the most excellent thing possible, a model also in its own kind, — whether higher or lower in degree is another question. The only fair comparison would be between him and that one of his contemporaries who endeavored to anachronize himself, so to speak, and to subject his art, so far as might be, to the laws of classical composition. Ben Jonson was a great man, and has sufficiently proved that he had an eye for the external marks of character; but when

he would make a whole of them, he gives us instead either a bundle of humors or an incorporated idea. With Shakespeare the plot is an interior organism, in Jonson an external contrivance. It is the difference between man and tortoise. In the one the osseous structure is out of sight, indeed, but sustains the flesh and blood that envelop it, while the other is boxed up and imprisoned in his bones.

I have been careful to confine myself to what may be called Shakespeare's ideal tragedies. In the purely historical or chronicle plays, the conditions are different, and his imagination submits itself to the necessary restrictions on its freedom of movement. Outside the tragedies also, the *Tempest* makes an exception worthy of notice. If I read it rightly, it is an example of how a great poet should write allegory, — not embodying metaphysical abstractions, but giving us ideals abstracted from life itself, suggesting an under-meaning everywhere, forcing it upon us nowhere, tantalizing the mind with hints that imply so much and tell so little, and yet keep the attention all eye and ear with eager, if fruitless, expectation. Here the leading characters are not merely typical, but symbolical, — that is, they do not illustrate a class of persons, they belong to universal Nature. Consider the scene of the play. Shakespeare is wont to take some familiar story, to lay his scene in some place the name of which, at least, is familiar, — well knowing the reserve of power that lies in the familiar as a background, when things are set in

front of it under a new and unexpected light. But in the *Tempest* the scene is laid nowhere, or certainly in no country laid down on any map. Nowhere, then? At once nowhere and anywhere, — for it is in the soul of man, that still vexed island hung between the upper and the nether world, and liable to incursions from both. There is scarce a play of Shakespeare's in which there is such variety of character, none in which character has so little to do in the carrying on and development of the story. But consider for a moment if ever the Imagination has been so embodied as in Prospero, the Fancy as in Ariel, the brute Understanding as in Caliban, who, the moment his poor wits are warmed with the glorious liquor of Stephano, plots rebellion against his natural lord, the higher Reason. Miranda is mere abstract Womanhood, as truly so before she sees Ferdinand as Eve before she was wakened to consciousness by the echo of her own nature coming back to her, the same, and yet not the same, from that of Adam. Ferdinand, again, is nothing more than Youth, compelled to drudge at something he despises, till the sacrifice of will and abnegation of self win him his ideal in Miranda. The subordinate personages are simply types; Sebastian and Antonio, of weak character and evil ambition; Gonzalo, of average sense and honesty; Adrian and Francisco, of the walking gentlemen who serve to fill up a world. They are not characters in the same sense with Iago, Falstaff, Shallow, or Leontius; and it is curious how every one of them loses his way in this enchanted island

of life, all the victims of one illusion after another, except Prospero, whose ministers are purely ideal. The whole play, indeed, is a succession of illusions, winding up with those solemn words of the great enchanter who had summoned to his service every shape of merriment or passion, every figure in the great tragi-comedy of life, and who was now bidding farewell to the scene of his triumphs. For in Prospero shall we not recognize the Artist himself, —

> "That did not better for his life provide
> Than public means which public manners breeds,
> Whence comes it that his name receives a brand," —

who has forfeited a shining place in the world's eye by devotion to his art, and who, turned adrift on the ocean of life in the leaky carcass of a boat, has shipwrecked on that Fortunate Island (as men always do who find their true vocation) where he is absolute lord, making all the powers of Nature serve him, but with Ariel and Caliban as special ministers? Of whom else could he have been thinking, when he says, —

> "Graves, at my command,
> Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let them forth,
> By my so potent art"?

Was this man, so extraordinary from whatever side we look at him, who ran so easily through the whole scale of human sentiment, from the homely common-sense of "When two men ride of one horse, one *must* ride behind," to the transcendental subtilty of

"No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change;
Thy pyramids, built up with newer might,
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
They are but dressings of a former sight," —

was he alone so unconscious of powers, some part of whose magic is recognized by all mankind, from the school-boy to the philosopher, that he merely sat by and saw them go without the least notion what they were about? Was he an inspired idiot, *votre bizarre Shakespeare?* a vast, irregular genius? a simple rustic, warbling his *native* wood-notes wild, in other words, insensible to the benefits of culture? When attempts have been made at various times to prove that this singular and seemingly contradictory creature, not one, but all mankind's epitome, was a musician, a lawyer, a doctor, a Catholic, a Protestant, an atheist, an Irishman, a discoverer of the circulation of the blood, and finally, that he was not himself, but somebody else, is it not a little odd that the last thing anybody should have thought of proving him was an artist? Nobody believes any longer that immediate inspiration is possible in modern times (as if God had grown old), — at least, nobody believes it of the prophets of those days, of John of Leyden, or Reeves, or Muggleton, — and yet everybody seems to take it for granted of this one man Shakespeare. He, somehow or other, without knowing it, was able to do what none of the rest of them, though knowing it all too perfectly well, could begin to do. Everybody seems to get afraid of him in turn. Voltaire plays gentleman usher for him

to his countrymen, and then, perceiving that his countrymen find a flavor in him beyond that of *Zaïre* or *Mahomet*, discovers him to be a *Sauvage ivre, sans le moindre étincelle de bon goût, et sans le moindre connoissance des règles.* Goethe, who tells us that *Götz von Berlichingen* was written in the Shakespearian manner, — and we certainly should not have guessed it, if he had not blabbed, — comes to the final conclusion, that Shakespeare was a poet, but not a dramatist. Châteaubriand thinks that he has corrupted art. "If, to attain," he says, "the height of tragic art, it be enough to heap together disparate scenes without order and without connection, to dovetail the burlesque with the pathetic, to set the water-carrier beside the monarch and the huckster-wench beside the queen, who may not reasonably flatter himself with being the rival of the greatest masters? Whoever should give himself the trouble to retrace a single one of his days, . . . to keep a journal from hour to hour, would have made a drama in the fashion of the English poet." But there are journals and journals, as the French say, and what goes into them depends on the eye that gathers for them. It is a long step from St. Simon to Dangeau, from Pepys to Thoresby, from Shakespeare even to the Marquis de Châteaubriand. M. Hugo alone, convinced that, as founder of the French Romantic School, there is a kind of family likeness between himself and Shakespeare, stands boldly forth to prove the father as extravagant as the son. Calm yourself, M. Hugo, you are no more a child of his than Will

Davenant was! But, after all, is it such a great crime to produce something absolutely new in a world so tedious as ours, and so apt to tell its old stories over again? I do not mean new in substance, but in the manner of presentation. Surely the highest office of a great poet is to show us how much variety, freshness, and opportunity abides in the obvious and familiar. He invents nothing, but seems rather to *re*-discover the world about him, and his penetrating vision gives to things of daily encounter something of the strangeness of new creation. Meanwhile the changed conditions of modern life demand a change in the method of treatment. The ideal is not a strait-waistcoat. Because *Alexis and Dora* is so charming, shall we have no *Paul and Virginia?* It was the idle endeavor to reproduce the old enchantment in the old way that gave us the pastoral, sent to the garret now with our grandmothers' achievements of the same sort in worsted. Every age says to its poets, like a mistress to her lover, "Tell me what I am like"; and he who succeeds in catching the evanescent expression that reveals character — which is as much as to say, what is intrinsically human — will be found to have caught something as imperishable as human nature itself. Aristophanes, by the vital and essential qualities of his humorous satire, is already more nearly our contemporary than Molière; and even the *Trouvères*, careless and trivial as they mostly are, could fecundate a great poet like Chaucer, and are still delightful reading.

The Attic tragedy still keeps its hold upon the loyalty of scholars through their imagination, or their pedantry, or their feeling of an exclusive property, as may happen, and, however alloyed with baser matter, this loyalty is legitimate and well bestowed. But the dominion of the Shakespearian is even wider. It pushes forward its boundaries from year to year, and moves no landmark backward. Here Alfieri and Lessing own a common allegiance; and the loyalty to him is one not of guild or tradition, but of conviction and enthusiasm. Can this be said of any other modern? of robust Corneille? of tender Racine? of Calderon even, with his tropical warmth and vigor of production? The Greeks and he are alike and alone in this, and for the same reason, that both are unapproachably the highest in their kind. Call him Gothic, if you like, but the inspiring mind that presided over the growth of these clustered masses of arch and spire and pinnacle and buttress is neither Greek nor Gothic, — it is simply genius lending itself to embody the new desire of man's mind, as it had embodied the old. After all, to be delightful is to be classic, and the chaotic never pleases long. But manifoldness is not confusion, any more than formalism is simplicity. If Shakespeare rejected the unities, as I think he who complains of "Art made tongue-tied by Authority" might very well deliberately do, it was for the sake of an imaginative unity more intimate than any of time and place. The antique in itself is not the ideal, though its remoteness from the vulgarity of

every-day associations helps to make it seem so. The true ideal is not opposed to the real, nor is it any artificial heightening thereof, but lies *in* it, and blessed are the eyes that find it! It is the *mens divinior* which hides within the actual, transfiguring matter-of-fact into matter-of-meaning for him who has the gift of second-sight. In this sense Hogarth is often more truly ideal than Raphael, Shakespeare often more truly so than the Greeks. I think it is a more or less conscious perception of this ideality, as it is a more or less well-grounded persuasion of it as respects the Greeks, that assures to him, as to them, and with equal justice, a permanent supremacy over the minds of men. This gives to his characters their universality, to his thought its irradiating property, while the artistic purpose running through and combining the endless variety of scene and character will alone account for his power of dramatic effect. Goethe affirmed, that, without Schröder's prunings and adaptations, Shakespeare was too undramatic for the German theatre, — that, if the theory that his plays should be represented textually should prevail, he would be driven from the boards. The theory has prevailed, and he not only holds his own, but is acted oftener than ever. It is not irregular genius that can do this, for surely Germany need not go abroad for what her own Werners could more than amply supply her with.

But I would much rather quote a fine saying than a bad prophecy of a man to whom I owe so much. Goethe, in one of the most perfect of his

shorter poems, tells us that a poem is like a painted window. Seen from without, (and he accordingly justifies the Philistine, who never looks at them otherwise,) they seem dingy and confused enough; but enter, and then

> "Da ist's auf einmal farbig helle,
> Geschicht' und Zierath glänzt in Schnelle."

With the same feeling he says elsewhere in prose, that "there is a destructive criticism and a productive. The former is very easy; for one has only to set up in his mind any standard, any model, however narrow" (let us say the Greeks), "and then boldly assert that the work under review does not match with it, and therefore is good for nothing, — the matter is settled, and one must at once deny its claim. Productive criticism is a great deal more difficult; it asks, What did the author propose to himself? Is what he proposes reasonable and comprehensible? and how far has he succeeded in carrying it out?" It is in applying this latter kind of criticism to Shakespeare that the Germans have set us an example worthy of all commendation. If they have been sometimes oversubtile, they at least had the merit of first looking at his works as wholes, as something that very likely contained an idea, perhaps conveyed a moral, if we could get at it. The illumination lent us by most of the English commentators reminds us of the candles which guides hold up to show us a picture in a dark place, the smoke of which gradually makes the work of the artist invisible under its repeated layers. Lessing, as might have been ex-

pected, opened the first glimpse in the new direction; Goethe followed with his famous exposition of Hamlet; A. W. Schlegel took a more comprehensive view in his Lectures, which Coleridge worked over into English, adding many fine criticisms of his own on single passages; and finally, Gervinus has devoted four volumes to a comment on the plays, full of excellent matter, though pushing the moral exegesis beyond all reasonable bounds.[1] With the help of all these, and especially of the last, I shall apply this theory of criticism to Hamlet, not in the hope of saying anything new, but of bringing something to the support of the thesis, that, if Shakespeare was skilful as a playwright, he was even greater as a dramatist, — that, if his immediate business was to fill the theatre, his higher object was to create something which, by fulfilling the conditions and answering the requirements of modern life, should as truly deserve to be called a work of art as others had deserved it by doing the same thing in former times and under other circumstances. Supposing him to have accepted — consciously or not is of little importance — the new terms of the problem which makes character the pivot of dramatic action, and consequently the key of dramatic unity, how far did he succeed?

Before attempting my analysis, I must clear away a little rubbish. Are such anachronisms as those of which Voltaire accuses Shakespeare in Hamlet, such as the introduction of cannon before

[1] I do not mention Ulrici's book, for it seems to me unwieldy and dull, — zeal without knowledge.

the invention of gunpowder, and making Christians of the Danes three centuries too soon, of the least bearing æsthetically? I think not; but as they are of a piece with a great many other criticisms upon the great poet, it is worth while to dwell upon them a moment.

The first demand we make upon whatever claims to be a work of art (and we have a right to make it) is that it shall be *in keeping*. Now this propriety is of two kinds, either extrinsic or intrinsic. In the first I should class whatever relates rather to the body than the soul of the work, such as fidelity to the facts of history, (wherever that is important,) congruity of costume, and the like, — in short, whatever might come under the head of *picturesque* truth, a departure from which would shock too rudely our preconceived associations. I have seen an Indian chief in French boots, and he seemed to me almost tragic; but, put upon the stage in tragedy, he would have been ludicrous. Lichtenberg, writing from London in 1775, tells us that Garrick played Hamlet in a suit of the French fashion, then commonly worn, and that he was blamed for it by some of the critics; but, he says, one hears no such criticism during the play, nor on the way home, nor at supper afterwards, nor indeed till the emotion roused by the great actor has had time to subside. He justifies Garrick, though we should not be able to endure it now. Yet nothing would be gained by trying to make Hamlet's costume true to the assumed period of the play, for the scene of it is laid in a Denmark that has no dates.

In the second and more important category, I should put, first, coördination of character, that is, a certain variety in harmony of the personages of a drama, as in the attitudes and coloring of the figures in a pictorial composition, so that, while mutually relieving and setting off each other, they shall combine in the total impression; second, that subordinate truth to Nature which makes each character coherent in itself; and, third, such propriety of costume and the like as shall satisfy the superhistoric sense, to which, and to which alone, the higher drama appeals. All these come within the scope of *imaginative* truth. To illustrate my third head by an example. Tieck criticises John Kemble's dressing for Macbeth in a modern Highland costume, as being ungraceful without any countervailing merit of historical exactness. I think a deeper reason for his dissatisfaction might be found in the fact, that this garb, with its purely modern and British army associations, is out of place on Forres Heath, and drags the Weird Sisters down with it from their proper imaginative remoteness in the gloom of the past to the disenchanting glare of the foot-lights. It is not the antiquarian, but the poetic conscience that is wounded. To this, exactness, so far as concerns ideal representation, may not only not be truth, but may even be opposed to it. Anachronisms and the like are in themselves of no account, and become important only when they make a gap too wide for our illusion to cross unconsciously, that is, when they are anacoluthons to the imagination. The aim of the

artist is psychologic, not historic truth. It is comparatively easy for an author to *get up* any period with tolerable minuteness in externals, but readers and audiences find more difficulty in getting them down, though oblivion swallows scores of them at a gulp. The saving truth in such matters is a truth to essential and permanent characteristics. The Ulysses of Shakespeare, like the Ulysses of Dante and Tennyson, more or less harmonizes with our ideal conception of the wary, long-considering, though adventurous son of Laertes, yet Simon Lord Lovat is doubtless nearer the original type. In Hamlet, though there be no Denmark of the ninth century, Shakespeare has suggested the prevailing rudeness of manners quite enough for his purpose. We see it in the single combat of Hamlet's father with the elder Fortinbras, in the vulgar wassail of the king, in the English monarch being expected to hang Rosencrantz and Guildenstern out of hand merely to oblige his cousin of Denmark, in Laertes, sent to Paris to be made a gentleman of, becoming instantly capable of any the most barbarous treachery to glut his vengeance. We cannot fancy Ragnar Lodbrog or Eric the Red matriculating at Wittenberg, but it was essential that Hamlet should be a scholar, and Shakespeare sends him thither without more ado. All through the play we get the notion of a state of society in which a savage nature has disguised itself in the externals of civilization, like a Maori deacon, who has only to strip and he becomes once more a tattooed pagan with his mouth watering for a spare-rib of

his pastor. Historically, at the date of Hamlet, the Danes were in the habit of burning their enemies alive in their houses, with as much of their family about them as might be to make it comfortable. Shakespeare seems purposely to have dissociated his play from history by changing nearly every name in the original legend. The motive of the play — revenge as a religious duty — belongs only to a social state in which the traditions of barbarism are still operative, but, with infallible artistic judgment, Shakespeare has chosen, not untamed Nature, as he found it in history, but the period of transition, a period in which the times are always out of joint, and thus the irresolution which has its root in Hamlet's own character is stimulated by the very incompatibility of that legacy of vengeance he has inherited from the past with the new culture and refinement of which he is the representative. One of the few books which Shakespeare is known to have possessed was Florio's Montaigne, and he might well have transferred the Frenchman's motto, *Que sçais je?* to the front of his tragedy; nor can I help fancying something more than accident in the fact that Hamlet has been a student at Wittenberg, whence those new ideas went forth, of whose results in unsettling men's faith, and consequently disqualifying them for promptness in action, Shakespeare had been not only an eye-witness, but which he must actually have experienced in himself.

One other objection let me touch upon here, especially as it has been urged against Hamlet, and

that is the introduction of low characters and comic scenes in tragedy. Even Garrick, who had just assisted at the Stratford Jubilee, where Shakespeare had been pronounced divine, was induced by this absurd outcry for the proprieties of the tragic stage to omit the grave-diggers' scene from Hamlet. Leaving apart the fact that Shakespeare would not have been the representative poet he is, if he had not given expression to this striking tendency of the Northern races, which shows itself constantly, not only in their literature, but even in their mythology and their architecture, the grave-diggers' scene always impresses me as one of the most pathetic in the whole tragedy. That Shakespeare introduced such scenes and characters with deliberate intention, and with a view to artistic relief and contrast, there can hardly be a doubt. We must take it for granted that a man whose works show everywhere the results of judgment sometimes acted with forethought. I find the springs of the profoundest sorrow and pity in this hardened indifference of the grave-diggers, in their careless discussion as to whether Ophelia's death were by suicide or no, in their singing and jesting at their dreary work.

> "A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,
> For — and a shrouding-sheet:
> O, a pit of clay for to be made
> For such a guest is meet!"

We know who is to be the guest of this earthen hospitality, — how much beauty, love, and heart-break are to be covered in that pit of clay. All

we remember of Ophelia reacts upon us with tenfold force, and we recoil from our amusement at the ghastly drollery of the two delvers with a shock of horror. That the unconscious Hamlet should stumble on *this* grave of all others, that it should be *here* that he should pause to muse humorously on death and decay, — all this prepares us for the revulsion of passion in the next scene, and for the frantic confession, —

> "I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all *their* quantity of love
> Make up my sum!"

And it is only here that such an asseveration would be true even to the feeling of the moment; for it is plain from all we know of Hamlet that he could not so have loved Ophelia, that he was incapable of the self-abandonment of a true passion, that he would have analyzed this emotion as he does all others, would have peeped and botanized upon it till it became to him a mere matter of scientific interest. All this force of contrast and this horror of surprise were necessary so to intensify his remorseful regret that he should believe himself for once in earnest. The speech of the King, "O, he is mad, Laertes," recalls him to himself, and he at once begins to rave: —

> "Zounds! show me what thou 'lt do!
> Woul't weep? woul't fight? woul't fast? woul't tear thyself?
> Woul't drink up eysil? eat a crocodile?"

It is easy to see that the whole plot hinges upon the character of Hamlet, that Shakespeare's conception of this was the ovum out of which the

whole organism was hatched. And here let me remark, that there is a kind of genealogical necessity in the character, — a thing not altogether strange to the attentive reader of Shakespeare. Hamlet seems the natural result of the mixture of father and mother in his temperament, the resolution and persistence of the one, like sound timber wormholed and made shaky, as it were, by the other's infirmity of will and discontinuity of purpose. In natures so imperfectly mixed it is not uncommon to find vehemence of intention the prelude and counterpoise of weak performance, the conscious nature striving to keep up its self-respect by a triumph in words all the more resolute that it feels assured beforehand of inevitable defeat in action. As in such slipshod housekeeping men are their own largest creditors, they find it easy to stave off utter bankruptcy of conscience by taking up one unpaid promise with another larger, and at heavier interest, till such self-swindling becomes habitual and by degrees almost painless. How did Coleridge discount his own notes of this kind with less and less specie as the figures lengthened on the paper! As with Hamlet, so it is with Ophelia and Laertes. The father's feebleness comes up again in the wasting heartbreak and gentle lunacy of the daughter, while the son shows it in a rashness of impulse and act, a kind of crankiness, of whose essential feebleness we are all the more sensible as contrasted with a nature so steady on its keel, and drawing so much water, as that of Horatio, — the foil at once, in different ways, both to him

and Hamlet. It was natural also, that the daughter of self-conceited old Polonius should have her softness stiffened with a fibre of obstinacy; for there are two kinds of weakness, that which breaks, and that which bends. Ophelia's is of the former kind; Hero is her counterpart, giving way before calamity, and rising again so soon as the pressure is removed.

I find two passages in Dante that contain the exactest possible definition of that habit or quality of Hamlet's mind which justifies the tragic turn of the play, and renders it natural and unavoidable from the beginning. The first is from the second canto of the *Inferno*: —

> "E quale è quei che disvuol ciò che volle,
> E per nuovi pensier cangia proposta,
> Sì che del cominciar tutto si tolle;
> Tal mi fec' io in quella oscura costa:
> Perchè pensando consumai la impresa
> Che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta."

> "And like the man who unwills what he willed,
> And for new thoughts doth change his first intent,
> So that he cannot anywhere begin,
> Such became I upon that slope obscure,
> Because with thinking I consumed resolve,
> That was so ready at the setting out."

Again, in the fifth of the *Purgatorio*: —

> "Che sempre l' uomo in cui pensier rampoglia
> Sovra pensier, da sè dilunga il segno,
> Perchè la foga l' un dell' altro insolla."

> "For always he in whom one thought buds forth
> Out of another farther puts the goal,
> For each has only force to mar the other."

Dante was a profound metaphysician, and as in the first passage he describes and defines a certain quality of mind, so in the other he tells us its result in the character and life, namely, indecision and failure, — the goal *farther* off at the end than at the beginning. It is remarkable how close a resemblance of thought, and even of expression, there is between the former of these quotations and a part of Hamlet's famous soliloquy: —

> "Thus conscience [i. e. consciousness] doth make cowards of us all:
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action!"

It is an inherent peculiarity of a mind like Hamlet's that it should be conscious of its own defect. Men of his type are forever analyzing their own emotions and motives. They cannot do anything, because they always see two ways of doing it. They cannot determine on any course of action, because they are always, as it were, standing at the cross-roads, and see too well the disadvantages of every one of them. It is not that they are incapable of resolve, but somehow the band between the motive power and the operative faculties is relaxed and loose. The engine works, but the machinery it should drive stands still. The imagination is so much in overplus, that thinking a thing becomes better than doing it, and thought with its easy perfection, capable of everything because it can accomplish everything with ideal means, is vastly

more attractive and satisfactory than deed, which must be wrought at best with imperfect instruments, and always falls short of the conception that went before it. "If to do," says Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*, — "if to do were as easy as to know what 't were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces." Hamlet knows only too well what 't were good to do, but he palters with everything in a double sense: he sees the grain of good there is in evil, and the grain of evil there is in good, as they exist in the world, and, finding that he can make those feather-weighted accidents balance each other, infers that there is little to choose between the essences themselves. He is of Montaigne's mind, and says expressly that "there is nothing good or ill, but thinking makes it so." He dwells so exclusively in the world of ideas that the world of facts seems trifling; nothing is worth the while; and he has been so long objectless and purposeless, so far as actual life is concerned, that, when at last an object and an aim are forced upon him, he cannot deal with them, and gropes about vainly for a motive outside of himself that shall marshal his thoughts for him and guide his faculties into the path of action. He is the victim not so much of feebleness of will as of an intellectual indifference that hinders the will from working long in any one direction. He wishes to will, but never wills. His continual iteration of resolve shows that he has no resolution. He is capable of passionate energy where the occasion presents itself suddenly from

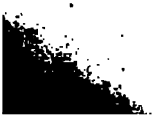
without, because nothing is so irritable as conscious irresolution with a duty to perform. But of deliberate energy he is not capable; for there the impulse must come from within, and the blade of his analysis is so subtile that it can divide the finest hair of motive 'twixt north and northwest side, leaving him desperate to choose between them. The very consciousness of his defect is an insuperable bar to his repairing it; for the unity of purpose, which infuses every fibre of the character with will available whenever wanted, is impossible where the mind can never rest till it has resolved that unity into its component elements, and satisfied itself which on the whole is of greater value. A critical instinct so insatiable that it must turn upon itself, for lack of something else to hew and hack, becomes incapable at last of originating anything except indecision. It becomes infallible in what *not* to do. How easily he might have accomplished his task is shown by the conduct of Laertes. When *he* has a death to avenge, he raises a mob, breaks into the palace, bullies the king, and proves how weak the usurper really was.

The world is the victim of splendid parts, and is slow to accept a rounded whole, because that is something which is long in completing, still longer in demonstrating its completion. We like to be surprised into admiration, and not logically convinced that we ought to admire. We are willing to be delighted with success, though we are somewhat indifferent to the homely qualities which insure it. Our thought is so filled with the rocket's

burst of momentary splendor so far above us, that we forget the poor stick, useful and unseen, that made its climbing possible. One of these homely qualities is continuity of character, and it escapes present applause because it tells chiefly in the long run, in results. With his usual tact, Shakespeare has brought in such a character as a contrast and foil to Hamlet. Horatio is the only complete *man* in the play, — solid, well-knit, and true; a noble, quiet nature, with that highest of all qualities, judgment, always sane and prompt; who never drags his anchors for any wind of opinion or fortune, but grips all the closer to the reality of things. He seems one of those calm, undemonstrative men whom we love and admire without asking to know why, crediting them with the capacity of great things, without any test of actual achievement, because we feel that their manhood is a constant quality, and no mere accident of circumstance and opportunity. Such men are always sure of the presence of their highest self on demand. Hamlet is continually drawing bills on the future, secured by his promise of himself to himself, which he can never redeem. His own somewhat feminine nature recognizes its complement in Horatio, and clings to it instinctively, as naturally as Horatio is attracted by that fatal gift of imagination, the absence of which makes the strength of his own character, as its overplus does the weakness of Hamlet's. It is a happy marriage of two minds drawn together by the charm of unlikeness. Hamlet feels in Horatio the solid steadiness which

he misses in himself; Horatio in Hamlet that need of service and sustainment to render which gives him a consciousness of his own value. Hamlet fills the place of a woman to Horatio, revealing him to himself not only in what he says, but by a constant claim upon his strength of nature; and there is great psychological truth in making suicide the first impulse of this quiet, undemonstrative man, after Hamlet's death, as if the very reason for his being were taken away with his friend's need of him. In his grief, he for the first and only time speaks of himself, is first made conscious of himself by his loss. If this manly reserve of Horatio be true to Nature, not less so are the communicativeness of Hamlet and his tendency to soliloquize. If self-consciousness be alien to the one, it is just as truly the happiness of the other. Like a musician distrustful of himself, he is forever tuning his instrument, first overstraining this cord a little, and then that, but unable to bring them into unison, or to profit by it if he could.

I do not believe that Horatio ever thought he "was not a pipe for Fortune's finger to play what stop she please," till Hamlet told him so. That was Fortune's affair, not his; let her try it, if she liked. He is unconscious of his own peculiar qualities, as men of decision commonly are, or they would not be men of decision. When there is a thing to be done, they go straight at it, and for the time there is nothing for them in the whole universe but themselves and their object. Hamlet, on the other hand, is always studying himself.



This world and the other, too, are always present to his mind, and there in the corner is the little black kobold of a doubt making mouths at him. He breaks down the bridges before him, not behind him, as a man of action would do; but there is something more than this. He is an ingrained sceptic; though his is the scepticism, not of reason, but of feeling, whose root is want of faith in himself. In him it is passive, a malady rather than a function of the mind. We might call him insincere: not that he was in any sense a hypocrite, but only that he never was and never could be in earnest. Never could be, because no man without intense faith in something ever can. Even if he only believed in himself, that were better than nothing; for it will carry a man a great way in the outward successes of life, nay, will even sometimes give him the Archimedean fulcrum for moving the world. But Hamlet doubts everything. He doubts the immortality of the soul, just after seeing his father's spirit, and hearing from its mouth the secrets of the other world. He doubts Horatio even, and swears him to secrecy on the cross of his sword, though probably he himself has no assured belief in the sacredness of the symbol. He doubts Ophelia, and asks her, "Are you honest?" He doubts the ghost, after he has had a little time to think about it, and so gets up the play to test the guilt of the king. And how coherent the whole character is! With what perfect tact and judgment Shakespeare, in the advice to the players, makes him an exquisite critic! For just here

that part of his character which would be weak in dealing with affairs is strong. A wise scepticism is the first attribute of a good critic. He must not believe that the fire-insurance offices will raise their rates of premium on the Charles, because the new volume of poems is printing at Riverside or the University Press. He must not believe so profoundly in the ancients as to think it wholly out of the question that the world has still vigor enough in its loins to beget some one who will one of these days be as good an ancient as any of them.

Another striking quality in Hamlet's nature is his perpetual inclination to irony. I think this has been generally passed over too lightly, as if it were something external and accidental, rather assumed as a mask than part of the real nature of the man. It seems to me to go deeper, to be something innate, and not merely factitious. It is nothing like the grave irony of Socrates, which was the weapon of a man thoroughly in earnest, — the *boomerang* of argument, which one throws in the opposite direction of what he means to hit, and which seems to be flying away from the adversary, who will presently find himself knocked down by it. It is not like the irony of Timon, which is but the wilful refraction of a clear mind twisting awry whatever enters it, — or of Iago, which is the slime that a nature essentially evil loves to trail over all beauty and goodness to taint them with distrust: it is the half-jest, half-earnest of an inactive temperament that has not quite made up its mind whether life is a reality or no, whether men were

not made in jest, and which amuses itself equally with finding a deep meaning in trivial things and a trifling one in the profoundest mysteries of being, because the want of earnestness in its own essence infects everything else with its own indifference. If there be now and then an unmannerly rudeness and bitterness in it, as in the scenes with Polonius and Osrick, we must remember that Hamlet was just in the condition which spurs men to sallies of this kind: dissatisfied, at one neither with the world nor with himself, and accordingly casting about for something out of himself to vent his spleen upon. But even in these passages there is no hint of earnestness, of any purpose beyond the moment; they are mere cat's-paws of vexation, and not the deep-raking ground-swell of passion, as we see it in the sarcasm of Lear.

The question of Hamlet's madness has been much discussed and variously decided. High medical authority has pronounced, as usual, on both sides of the question. But the induction has been drawn from too narrow premises, being based on a mere diagnosis of the *case*, and not on an appreciation of the character in its completeness. We have a case of pretended madness in the Edgar of *King Lear*; and it is certainly true that that is a charcoal sketch, coarsely outlined, compared with the delicate drawing, the lights, shades, and half-tints of the portraiture in Hamlet. But does this tend to prove that the madness of the latter, because truer to the recorded observation of experts, is real, and meant to be real, as the other to be fictitious? Not

in the least, as it appears to me. Hamlet, among all the characters of Shakespeare, is the most eminently a metaphysician and psychologist. He is a close observer, continually analyzing his own nature and that of others, letting fall his little drops of acid irony on all who come near him, to make them show what they are made of. Even Ophelia is not too sacred, Osrick not too contemptible for experiment. If such a man assumed madness, he would play his part perfectly. If Shakespeare himself, without going mad, could so observe and remember all the abnormal symptoms as to be able to reproduce them in Hamlet, why should it be beyond the power of Hamlet to reproduce them in himself? If you deprive Hamlet of reason, there is no truly tragic motive left. He would be a fit subject for Bedlam, but not for the stage. We might have pathology enough, but no pathos. Ajax first becomes tragic when he recovers his wits. If Hamlet is irresponsible, the whole play is a chaos. That he is not so might be proved by evidence enough, were it not labor thrown away.

This feigned madness of Hamlet's is one of the few points in which Shakespeare has kept close to the old story on which he founded his play; and as he never decided without deliberation, so he never acted without unerring judgment. Hamlet *drifts* through the whole tragedy. He never keeps on one tack long enough to get steerage-way, even if, in a nature like his, with those electric streamers of whim and fancy forever wavering across the vault of his brain, the needle of judgment would

point in one direction long enough to strike a course by. The scheme of simulated insanity is precisely the one he would have been likely to hit upon, because it enabled him to follow his own bent, and to drift with an apparent purpose, postponing decisive action by the very means he adopts to arrive at its accomplishment, and satisfying himself with the show of doing something that he may escape so much the longer the dreaded necessity of really doing anything at all. It enables him to *play* with life and duty, instead of taking them by the rougher side, where alone any firm grip is possible, — to feel that he is on the way towards accomplishing somewhat, when he is really paltering with his own irresolution. Nothing, I think, could be more finely imagined than this. Voltaire complains that he goes mad without any sufficient object or result. Perfectly true, and precisely what was most natural for him to do, and, accordingly, precisely what Shakespeare meant that he should do. It was delightful to him to indulge his imagination and humor, to prove his capacity for something by playing a part: the one thing he could not do was to bring himself to *act*, unless when surprised by a sudden impulse of suspicion, — as where he kills Polonius, and there he could not see his victim. He discourses admirably of suicide, but does not kill himself; he talks daggers, but uses none. He puts by his chance to kill the king with the excuse that he will not do it while he is praying, lest his soul be saved thereby, though it be more than doubtful whether he believed himself that, if there

were a soul to be saved, it could be saved by that expedient. He allows himself to be packed off to England, without any motive except that it would for the time take him farther from a present duty, the more disagreeable to a nature like his because it *was* present, and not a mere matter for speculative consideration. When Goethe made his famous comparison of the acorn planted in a vase which it bursts with its growth, and says that in like manner Hamlet is a nature which breaks down under the weight of a duty too great for it to bear, he seems to have considered the character too much from one side. Had Hamlet actually killed himself to escape his too onerous commission, Goethe's conception of him would have been satisfactory enough. But Hamlet was hardly a sentimentalist, like Werther; on the contrary, he saw things only too clearly in the dry north-light of the intellect. It is chance that at last brings him to his end. It would appear rather that Shakespeare intended to show us an imaginative temperament brought face to face with actualities, into any clear relation of sympathy with which it cannot bring itself. The very means that Shakespeare makes use of to lay upon him the obligation of acting — the ghost — really seems to make it all the harder for him to act; for the spectre but gives an additional excitement to his imagination and a fresh topic for his scepticism.

I shall not attempt to evolve any high moral significance from the play, even if I thought it possible; for that would be aside from the present purpose. The scope of the higher drama is to

represent life, not every-day life, it is true, but life lifted above the plane of bread-and-butter associations, by nobler reaches of language, by the influence at once inspiring and modulating of verse, by an intenser play of passion condensing that misty mixture of feeling and reflection which makes the ordinary atmosphere of existence into flashes of thought and phrase whose brief, but terrible, illumination prints the outworn landscape of every-day upon our brains, with its little motives and mean results, in lines of tell-tale fire. The moral office of tragedy is to show us our own weaknesses idealized in grander figures and more awful results, — to teach us that what we pardon in ourselves as venial faults, if they seem to have but slight influence on our immediate fortunes, have arms as long as those of kings, and reach forward to the catastrophe of our lives; that they are dry-rotting the very fibre of will and conscience, so that, if we should be brought to the test of a great temptation or a stringent emergency, we must be involved in a ruin as sudden and complete as that we shudder at in the unreal scene of the theatre. But the primary *object* of a tragedy is not to inculcate a formal moral. Representing life, it teaches, like life, by indirection, by those nods and winks that are thrown away on us blind horses in such profusion. We may learn, to be sure, plenty of lessons from Shakespeare. We are not likely to have kingdoms to divide, crowns foretold us by weird sisters, a father's death to avenge, or to kill our wives from jealousy; but Lear may teach us to draw the line more clearly between a

wise generosity and a loose-handed weakness of giving; Macbeth, how one sin involves another, and forever another, by a fatal parthenogenesis, and that the key which unlocks forbidden doors to our will or passion leaves a stain on the hand, that may not be so dark as blood, but that will not out; Hamlet, that all the noblest gifts of person, temperament, and mind slip like sand through the grasp of an infirm purpose; Othello, that the perpetual silt of some one weakness, the eddies of a suspicious temper depositing their one impalpable layer after another, may build up a shoal on which an heroic life and an otherwise magnanimous nature may bilge and go to pieces. All this we may learn, and much more, and Shakespeare was no doubt well aware of all this and more; but I do not believe that he wrote his plays with any such didactic purpose. He knew human nature too well not to know that one thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness of warning, — that, where one man shapes his life by precept and example, there are a thousand who have it shaped for them by impulse and by circumstances. He did not mean his great tragedies for scarecrows, as if the nailing of one hawk to the barn-door would prevent the next from coming down souse into the hen-yard. No, it is not the poor bleaching victim hung up to moult its draggled feathers in the rain that he wishes to show us. He loves the hawk-nature as well as the hen-nature; and if he is unequalled in anything, it is in that sunny breadth of view, that impregnability of reason, that looks down on all ranks and con-

ditions of men, all fortune and misfortune, with the equal eye of the pure artist.

Whether I have fancied anything into Hamlet which the author never dreamed of putting there I do not greatly concern myself to inquire. Poets are always entitled to a royalty on whatever we find in their works; for these fine creations as truly build themselves up in the brain as they are built up with deliberate forethought. Praise art as we will, that which the artist did not mean to put into his work, but which found itself there by some generous process of Nature of which he was as unaware as the blue river is of its rhyme with the blue sky, has somewhat in it that snatches us into sympathy with higher things than those which come by plot and observation. Goethe wrote his *Faust* in its earliest form without a thought of the deeper meaning which the exposition of an age of criticism was to find in it: without foremeaning it, he had impersonated in Mephistopheles the genius of his century. Shall this subtract from the debt we owe him? Not at all. If originality were conscious of itself, it would have lost its right to be original. I believe that Shakespeare intended to impersonate in Hamlet not a mere metaphysical entity, but a man of flesh and blood: yet it is certainly curious how prophetically typical the character is of that introversion of mind which is so constant a phenomenon of these latter days, of that over-consciousness which wastes itself in analyzing the motives of action instead of acting.

The old painters had a rule, that all compositions

should be pyramidal in form, — a central figure, from which the others slope gradually away on the two sides. Shakespeare probably had never heard of this rule, and, if he had, would not have been likely to respect it more than he has the so-called classical unities of time and place. But he understood perfectly the artistic advantages of gradation, contrast, and relief. Taking Hamlet as the keynote, we find in him weakness of character, which, on the one hand, is contrasted with the feebleness that springs from overweening conceit in Polonius and with frailty of temperament in Ophelia, while, on the other hand, it is brought into fuller relief by the steady force of Horatio and the impulsive violence of Laertes, who is resolute from thoughtlessness, just as Hamlet is irresolute from overplus of thought.

If we must draw a moral from Hamlet, it would seem to be, that Will is Fate, and that, Will once abdicating, the inevitable successor in the regency is Chance. Had Hamlet acted, instead of musing how good it would be to act, the king might have been the only victim. As it is, all the main actors in the story are the fortuitous sacrifice of his irresolution. We see how a single great vice of character at last draws to itself as allies and confederates all other weaknesses of the man, as in civil wars the timid and the selfish wait to throw themselves upon the stronger side.

> "In Life's small things be resolute and great
> To keep thy muscles trained: know'st thou when Fate
> Thy measure takes? or when she 'll say to thee,
> 'I find thee worthy, do this thing for me'?"

I have said that it was doubtful if Shakespeare had any conscious moral intention in his writings. I meant only that he was purely and primarily poet. And while he was an English poet in a sense that is true of no other, his method was thoroughly Greek, yet with this remarkable difference, — that, while the Greek dramatists took purely national themes and gave them a universal interest by their mode of treatment, he took what may be called cosmopolitan traditions, legends of human nature, and nationalized them by the infusion of his perfectly Anglican breadth of character and solidity of understanding. Wonderful as his imagination and fancy are, his perspicacity and artistic discretion are more so. This country tradesman's son, coming up to London, could set high-bred wits, like Beaumont, uncopiable lessons in drawing gentlemen such as are seen nowhere else but on the canvas of Titian; he could take Ulysses away from Homer and expand the shrewd and crafty islander into a statesman whose words are the pith of history. But what makes him yet more exceptional was his utterly unimpeachable judgment, and that poise of character which enabled him to be at once the greatest of poets and so unnoticeable a good citizen as to leave no incidents for biography. His material was never far-sought; (it is still disputed whether the fullest head of which we have record were cultivated beyond the range of grammar-school precedent!) but he used it with a poetic instinct which we cannot parallel, identified himself with it, yet remained always its

born and questionless master. He finds the Clown and Fool upon the stage, — he makes them the tools of his pleasantry, his satire, his wisdom, and even his pathos; he finds a fading rustic superstition, and shapes out of it ideal Pucks, Titanias, and Ariels, in whose existence statesmen and scholars believe forever. Always poet, he subjects all to the ends of his art, and gives in Hamlet the churchyard ghost, but with the cothurnus on, — the messenger of God's revenge against murder; always philosopher, he traces in Macbeth the metaphysics of apparitions, painting the shadowy Banquo only on the o'erwrought brain of the murderer, and staining the hand of his wife-accomplice (because she was the more refined and higher nature) with the disgustful blood-spot that is not there. I say he had no moral intention, for the reason, that, as artist, it was not his to deal with the realities, but only with the shows of things; yet, with a temperament so just, an insight so inevitable as his, it was impossible that the moral reality, which underlies the *mirage* of the poet's vision, should not always be suggested. His humor and satire are never of the destructive kind; what he does in that way is suggestive only, — not breaking bubbles with Thor's hammer, but puffing them away with the breath of a Clown, or shivering them with the light laugh of a genial cynic. Men go about to prove the existence of a God! Was it a bit of phosphorus, that brain whose creations are so real, that, mixing with them, we feel as if we ourselves were but fleeting magic-lantern shadows?

But higher even than the genius I rate the character of this unique man, and the grand impersonality of what he wrote. What has he told us of himself? In our self-exploiting nineteenth century, with its melancholy liver-complaint, how serene and high he seems! If he had sorrows, he has made them the woof of everlasting consolation to his kind; and if, as poets are wont to whine, the outward world was cold to him, its biting air did but trace itself in loveliest frost-work of fancy on the many windows of that self-centred and cheerful soul.

DRYDEN[1]

1868

BENVENUTO CELLINI tells us that when, in his boyhood, he saw a salamander come out of the fire, his grandfather forthwith gave him a sound beating, that he might the better remember so unique a prodigy. Though perhaps in this case the rod had another application than the autobiographer chooses to disclose, and was intended to fix in the pupil's mind a lesson of veracity rather than of science, the testimony to its mnemonic virtue remains. Nay, so universally was it once believed that the senses, and through them the faculties of observation and retention, were quickened by an irritation of the cuticle, that in France it was cus-

[1] *The Dramatick Works of John Dryden, Esq.* In six volumes. London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, in the Strand. MDCCXXXV. 18mo.

The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose-Works of John Dryden, now first collected. With Notes and Illustrations. An Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, grounded on Original and Authentick Documents; and a Collection of his Letters, the greatest Part of which has never before been published. By Edmund Malone, Esq. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, in the Strand. 4 vols. 8vo.

The Poetical Works of John Dryden. (Edited by Mitford.) London: W. Pickering. 1832. 5 vols. 18mo.

tomary to whip the children annually at the boundaries of the parish, lest the true place of them might ever be lost through neglect of so inexpensive a mordant for the memory. From this practice the older school of critics should seem to have taken a hint for keeping fixed the limits of good taste, and what was somewhat vaguely called *classical* English. To mark these limits in poetry, they set up as Hermæ the images they had made to them of Dryden, of Pope, and later of Goldsmith. Here they solemnly castigated every new aspirant in verse, who in turn performed the same function for the next generation, thus helping to keep always sacred and immovable the *ne plus ultra* alike of inspiration and of the vocabulary. Though no two natures were ever much more unlike than those of Dryden and Pope, and again of Pope and Goldsmith, and no two styles, except in such externals as could be easily caught and copied, yet it was the fashion, down even to the last generation, to advise young writers to form themselves, as it was called, on these excellent models. Wordsworth himself began in this school; and though there were glimpses, here and there, of a direct study of nature, yet most of the epithets in his earlier pieces were of the traditional kind so fatal to poetry during great part of the last century; and he indulged in that alphabetic personification which enlivens all such words as Hunger, Solitude, Freedom, by the easy magic of an initial capital.

"Where the green apple shrivels on the spray,
And pines the unripened pear in summer's kindliest ray,

Even here Content has fixed her smiling reign
With Independence, child of high Disdain.
Exulting 'mid the winter of the skies,
Shy as the jealous chamois, Freedom flies,
And often grasps her sword, and often eyes."

Here we have every characteristic of the artificial method, (if we except the unconscious alexandrine in the second line) even to the triplet, which Swift hated so heartily as "a vicious way of rhyming wherewith Mr. Dryden abounded, imitated by all the bad versifiers of Charles the Second's reign." Wordsworth became, indeed, very early the leader of reform; but, like Wesley, he endeavored a reform within the Establishment. Purifying the substance, he retained the outward forms with a feeling rather than conviction that, in poetry, substance and form are but manifestations of the same inward life, the one fused into the other in the vivid heat of their common expression. Wordsworth could never wholly shake off the influence of the century into which he was born. He began by proposing a reform of the ritual, but it went no further than an attempt to get rid of the words of Latin original where the meaning was as well or better given in derivatives of the Saxon. He would have stricken out the "assemble" and left the "meet together." Like Wesley, he might be compelled by necessity to a breach of the canon; but, like him, he was never a willing schismatic, and his singing robes were the full and flowing canonicals of the church by law established. Inspiration makes short work with the usage of the

best authors and with the ready-made elegances of diction; but where Wordsworth is not possessed by his demon, as Molière said of Corneille, he equals Thomson in verbiage, out-Miltons Milton in artifice of style, and Latinizes his diction beyond Dryden. The fact was, that he took up his early opinions on instinct, and insensibly modified them as he studied the masters of what may be called the Middle Period of English verse.[1] As a young man, he disparaged Virgil ("We talked a great deal of nonsense in those days," he said when taken to task for it later in life); at fifty-nine he translated three books of the Æneid, in emulation of Dryden, though falling far short of him in everything but closeness, as he seems, after a few years, to have been convinced. Keats was the first resolute and wilful heretic, the true founder of the modern school, which admits no cis-Elizabethan authority save Milton, whose own English was formed upon those earlier models. Keats denounced the authors of that style which came in toward the close of the seventeenth century, and reigned absolute through the whole of the eighteenth, as

> "A schism,
> Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,
> . . . . who went about
> Holding a poor decrepit standard out,
> Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
> The name of one Boileau!"

[1] His "Character of a Happy Warrior" (1806), one of his noblest poems, has a dash of Dryden in it, — still more his "Epistle to Sir George Beaumont (1811)."

But Keats had never then[1] studied the writers of whom he speaks so contemptuously, though he might have profited by so doing. Boileau would at least have taught him that *flimsy* would have been an apter epithet for the *standard* than for the mottoes upon it. Dryden was the author of that schism against which Keats so vehemently asserts the claim of the orthodox teaching it had displaced. He was far more just to Boileau, of whom Keats had probably never read a word. "If I would only cross the seas," he says, "I might find in France a living Horace and a Juvenal in the person of the admirable Boileau, whose numbers are excellent, whose expressions are noble, whose thoughts are just, whose language is pure, whose satire is pointed, and whose sense is just. What he borrows from the ancients he repays with usury of his own, in coin as good and almost as universally valuable."[2]

Dryden has now been in his grave nearly a hundred and seventy years; in the second class of English poets perhaps no one stands, on the whole, so high as he; during his lifetime, in spite of jealousy, detraction, unpopular politics, and a suspicious change of faith, his preëminence was conceded; he was the earliest complete type of the purely literary man, in the modern sense; there is a singular unanimity in allowing him a certain claim to *greatness* which would be denied to men

[1] He studied Dryden's versification before writing his "Lamia."

[2] *On the Origin and Progress of Satire.* See Johnson's counter opinion in his life of Dryden.

as famous and more read, — to Pope or Swift, for example; he is supposed, in some way or other, to have reformed English poetry. It is now about half a century since the only uniform edition of his works was edited by Scott. No library is complete without him, no name is more familiar than his, and yet it may be suspected that few writers are more thoroughly buried in that great cemetery of the "British Poets." If contemporary reputation be often deceitful, posthumous fame may be generally trusted, for it is a verdict made up of the suffrages of the select men in succeeding generations. This verdict has been as good as unanimous in favor of Dryden. It is, perhaps, worth while to take a fresh observation of him, to consider him neither as warning nor example, but to endeavor to make out what it is that has given so lofty and firm a position to one of the most unequal, inconsistent, and faulty writers that ever lived. He is a curious example of what we often remark of the living, but rarely of the dead, — that they get credit for what they might be quite as much as for what they are, — and posterity has applied to him one of his own rules of criticism, judging him by the best rather than the average of his achievement, a thing posterity is seldom wont to do. On the losing side in politics, it is true of his polemical writings as of Burke's, — whom in many respects he resembles, and especially in that supreme quality of a reasoner, that his mind gathers not only heat, but clearness and expansion, by its own motion, — that they have

won his battle for him in the judgment of after times.

To me, looking back at him, he gradually becomes a singularly interesting and even picturesque figure. He is, in more senses than one, in language, in turn of thought, in style of mind, in the direction of his activity, the first of the moderns. He is the first literary man who was also a man of the world, as we understand the term. He succeeded Ben Jonson as the acknowledged dictator of wit and criticism, as Dr. Johnson, after nearly the same interval, succeeded him. All ages are, in some sense, ages of transition; but there are times when the transition is more marked, more rapid; and it is, perhaps, an ill fortune for a man of letters to arrive at maturity during such a period, still more to represent in himself the change that is going on, and to be an efficient cause in bringing it about. Unless, like Goethe, he be of a singularly uncontemporaneous nature, capable of being *tutta in se romita*, and of running parallel with his time rather than being sucked into its current, he will be thwarted in that harmonious development of native force which has so much to do with its steady and successful application. Dryden suffered, no doubt, in this way. Though in creed he seems to have drifted backward in an eddy of the general current; yet of the intellectual movement of the time, so far certainly as literature shared in it, he could say, with Æneas, not only that he saw, but that himself was a great part of it. That movement was, on the whole, a down-

ward one, from faith to scepticism, from enthusiasm to cynicism, from the imagination to the understanding. It was in a direction altogether away from those springs of imagination and faith at which they of the last age had slaked the thirst or renewed the vigor of their souls. Dryden himself recognized that indefinable and gregarious influence which we call nowadays the Spirit of the Age, when he said that "every Age has a kind of universal Genius."[1] He had also a just notion of that in which he lived; for he remarks, incidentally, that "all knowing ages are naturally sceptic and not at all bigoted, which, if I am not much deceived, is the proper character of our own."[2] It may be conceived that he was even painfully half-aware of having fallen upon a time incapable, not merely of a great poet, but perhaps of any poet at all; for nothing is so sensitive to the chill of a sceptical atmosphere as that enthusiasm which, if it be not genius, is at least the beautiful illusion that saves it from the baffling quibbles of self-consciousness. Thrice unhappy he who, born to see things as they might be, is schooled by circumstances to see them as people say they are, — to read God in a prose translation. Such was Dryden's lot, and such, for a good part of his days, it was by his own choice. He who was of a stature to snatch the torch of life that flashes from lifted hand to hand along the generations, over the heads of inferior men, chose rather to be a link-boy to the stews.

[1] *Essay on Dramatick Poesy.* [2] *Life of Lucian.*

As a writer for the stage, he deliberately adopted and repeatedly reaffirmed the maxim that

"He who lives to please, must please to live."

Without earnest convictions, no great or sound literature is conceivable. But if Dryden mostly wanted that inspiration which comes of belief in and devotion to something nobler and more abiding than the present moment and its petulant need, he had, at least, the next best thing to that, — a thorough faith in himself. He was, moreover, a man of singularly open soul, and of a temper self-confident enough to be candid even with himself. His mind was growing to the last, his judgment widening and deepening, his artistic sense refining itself more and more. He confessed his errors, and was not ashamed to retrace his steps in search of that better knowledge which the omniscience of superficial study had disparaged. Surely an intellect that is still pliable at seventy is a phenomenon as interesting as it is rare. But at whatever period of his life we look at Dryden, and whatever, for the moment, may have been his poetic creed, there was something in the nature of the man that would not be wholly subdued to what it worked in. There are continual glimpses of something in him greater than he, hints of possibilities finer than anything he has done. You feel that the whole of him was better than any random specimens, though of his best, seem to prove. *Incessu patet*, he has by times the large stride of the elder race, though it sinks too often into the slouch of a man who has seen better days. His grand air may, in part,

spring from a habit of easy superiority to his competitors; but must also, in part, be ascribed to an innate dignity of character. That this preëminence should have been so generally admitted, during his life, can only be explained by a bottom of good sense, kindliness, and sound judgment, whose solid worth could afford that many a flurry of vanity, petulance, and even error should flit across the surface and be forgotten. Whatever else Dryden may have been, the last and abiding impression of him is, that he was thoroughly manly; and while it may be disputed whether he were a great poet, it may be said of him, as Wordsworth said of Burke, that "he was by far the greatest man of his age, not only abounding in knowledge himself, but feeding, in various directions, his most able contemporaries."[1]

Dryden was born in 1631. He was accordingly six years old when Jonson died, was nearly a quarter of a century younger than Milton, and may have personally known Bishop Hall, the first English satirist, who was living till 1656. On the other side, he was older than Swift by thirty-six, than Addison by forty-one, and than Pope by fifty-seven years. Dennis says that "Dryden, for the last ten years of his life, was much acquainted with Addison, and drank with him more than he ever used to do, probably so far as to hasten his end," being commonly "an extreme sober man." Pope tells us that, in his twelfth year, he "saw Dryden,"

[1] "The great man must have that intellect which puts in motion the intellect of others." — Landor, *Im. Con.*, Diogenes and Plato.

perhaps at Will's, perhaps in the street, as Scott did Burns. Dryden himself visited Milton now and then, and was intimate with Davenant, who could tell him of Fletcher and Jonson from personal recollection. Thus he stands between the age before and that which followed him, giving a hand to each. His father was a country clergyman, of Puritan leanings, a younger son of an ancient county family. The Puritanism is thought to have come in with the poet's great-grandfather, who made in his will the somewhat singular statement that he was "assured by the Holy Ghost that he was elect of God." It would appear from this that Dryden's self-confidence was an inheritance. The solid quality of his mind showed itself early. He himself tells us that he had read Polybius "in English, with the pleasure of a boy, before he was ten years of age, and yet even then *had some dark notions of the prudence with which he conducted his design.*"[1] The concluding words are very characteristic, even if Dryden, as men commonly do, interpreted his boyish turn of mind by later self-knowledge. We thus get a glimpse of him browsing — for, like Johnson, Burke, and the full as distinguished from the learned men, he was always a random reader[2] — in his father's library, and painfully culling here and there a spray of his own proper nutriment from among the stubs and thorns of Puritan divinity. After such schooling

[1] *Character of Polybius* (1692).

[2] "For my own part, who must confess it to my shame that I never read anything but for pleasure." — *Life of Plutarch* (1683).

as could be had in the country, he was sent up to Westminster School, then under the headship of the celebrated Dr. Busby. Here he made his first essays in verse, translating, among other school exercises of the same kind, the third satire of Persius. In 1650 he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, and remained there for seven years. The only record of his college life is a discipline imposed, in 1652, for "disobedience to the Vice-Master, and contumacy in taking his punishment, inflicted by him." Whether this punishment was corporeal, as Johnson insinuates in the similar case of Milton, we are ignorant. He certainly retained no very fond recollection of his Alma Mater, for in his "Prologue to the University of Oxford" he says: —

> "Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother university;
> Thebes did his green, unknowing youth engage,
> He chooses Athens in his riper age."

By the death of his father, in 1654, he came into possession of a small estate of sixty pounds a year, from which, however, a third must be deducted, for his mother's dower, till 1676. After leaving Cambridge, he became secretary to his near relative, Sir Gilbert Pickering, at that time Cromwell's chamberlain, and a member of his Upper House. In 1670 he succeeded Davenant as Poet Laureate,[1] and Howell as Historiographer, with a yearly

[1] Gray says petulantly enough that "Dryden was as disgraceful to the office, from his character, as the poorest scribbler could have been from his verses." — Gray to Mason, 19th December, 1757.

salary of two hundred pounds. This place he lost at the Revolution, and had the mortification to see his old enemy and butt, Shadwell, promoted to it, as the best poet the Whig party could muster. If William was obliged to read the verses of his official minstrel, Dryden was more than avenged. From 1688 to his death, twelve years later, he earned his bread manfully by his pen, without any mean complaining, and with no allusion to his fallen fortunes that is not dignified and touching. These latter years, during which he was his own man again, were probably the happiest of his life. In 1664 or 1665 he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. About a hundred pounds a year were thus added to his income. The marriage is said not to have been a happy one, and perhaps it was not, for his wife was apparently a weak-minded woman; but the inference from the internal evidence of Dryden's plays, as of Shakespeare's, is very untrustworthy, ridicule of marriage having always been a common stock in trade of the comic writers.

The earliest of his verses that have come down to us were written upon the death of Lord Hastings, and are as bad as they can be, — a kind of parody on the worst of Donne. They have every fault of his manner, without a hint of the subtle and often profound thought that more than redeems it. As the Doctor himself would have said, here is Donne outdone. The young nobleman died of the small-pox, and Dryden exclaims with truly comic pathos, —

> "Was there no milder way than the small-pox,
> The very filthiness of Pandora's box?"

He compares the pustules to "rosebuds stuck i' the lily skin about," and says that

> "Each little pimple had a tear in it
> To wail the fault its rising did commit."

But he has not done his worst yet, by a great deal. What follows is even finer: —

> "No comet need foretell his change drew on,
> Whose corpse might seem a constellation.
> O, had he died of old, how great a strife
> Had been who from his death should draw their life!
> Who should, by one rich draught, become whate'er
> Seneca, Cato, Numa, Cæsar, were,
> Learned, virtuous, pious, great, and have by this
> An universal metempsychosis!
> Must all these aged sires in one funeral
> Expire? all die in one so young, so small?"

It is said that one of Allston's early pictures was brought to him, after he had long forgotten it, and his opinion asked as to the wisdom of the young artist's persevering in the career he had chosen. Allston advised his quitting it forthwith as hopeless. Could the same experiment have been tried with these verses upon Dryden, can any one doubt that his counsel would have been the same? It should be remembered, however, that he was barely turned eighteen when they were written, and the tendency of his style is noticeable in so early an abandonment of the participial *ed* in *learned* and *aged*. In the next year he appears again in some commendatory verses prefixed to the sacred epigrams of his friend, John Hoddesdon. In these he speaks of the author as a

"Young eaglet, who, thy nest thus soon forsook,
So lofty and divine a course hast took
As all admire, before the down begin
To peep, as yet, upon thy smoother chin."

Here is almost every fault which Dryden's later nicety would have condemned. But perhaps there is no schooling so good for an author as his own youthful indiscretions. Certainly there is none so severe. After this effort Dryden seems to have lain fallow for ten years, and then he at length reappears in thirty-seven "heroic stanzas" on the death of Cromwell. The versification is smoother, but the conceits are there again, though in a milder form. The verse is modelled after "Gondibert." A single image from nature (he was almost always happy in these) gives some hint of the maturer Dryden: —

"And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,
Made him but greater seem, not greater grow."

Two other verses,

"And the isle, when her protecting genius went,
Upon his obsequies loud sighs conferred,"

are interesting, because they show that he had been studying the early poems of Milton. He has contrived to bury under a rubbish of verbiage one of the most purely imaginative passages ever written by the great Puritan poet.

"From haunted spring and dale,
Edged with poplar pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent."

This is the more curious because, twenty-four years afterwards, he says, in defending rhyme: "What-

ever causes he [Milton] alleges for the abolishment of rhyme, his own particular reason is plainly this, that rhyme was not his talent; he had neither the ease of doing it nor the graces of it: which is manifest in his *Juvenilia*, . . . where his rhyme is always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him, at an age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymer, though not a poet." [1] It was this, no doubt, that heartened Dr. Johnson to say of "Lycidas" that "the diction was harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." It is Dryden's excuse that his characteristic excellence is to argue persuasively and powerfully, whether in verse or prose, and that he was amply endowed with the most needful quality of an advocate, — to be always strongly and wholly of his present way of thinking, whatever it might be. Next we have, in 1660, "Astræa Redux" on the "happy restoration" of Charles II. In this also we can forebode little of the full-grown Dryden but his defects. We see his tendency to exaggeration, and to confound physical with metaphysical, as where he says of the ships that brought home the royal brothers, that

> "The joyful London meets
> The princely York, himself alone a freight,
> The Swiftsure groans beneath great Gloster's weight,"

and speaks of the

> "Repeated prayer
> Which stormed the skies and ravished Charles from thence."

[1] *Essay on the Origin and Progress of Satire.*

There is also a certain everydayness, not to say vulgarity, of phrase, which Dryden never wholly refined away, and which continually tempts us to sum up at once against him as the greatest poet that ever was or could be made wholly out of prose.

> "Heaven would no bargain for its blessings drive"

is an example. On the other hand, there are a few verses almost worthy of his best days, as these: —

> "Some lazy ages lost in sleep and ease,
> No action leave to busy chronicles;
> Such whose *supine felicity* but makes
> In story chasms, in epochas mistakes,
> O'er whom Time gently shakes his wings of down,
> Till with his silent sickle they are mown."

These are all the more noteworthy, that Dryden, unless in argument, is seldom equal for six lines together. In the poem to Lord Clarendon (1662) there are four verses that have something of the "energy divine" for which Pope praised his master.

> "Let envy, then, those crimes within you see
> From which the happy never must be free;
> Envy that does with misery reside,
> The joy and the revenge of ruined pride."

In his "Aurengzebe" (1675) there is a passage, of which, as it is a good example of Dryden, I shall quote the whole, though my purpose aim mainly at the latter verses: —

> "When I consider life, 't is all a cheat;
> Yet, fooled with Hope, men favor the deceit,

Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay;
To-morrow 's falser than the former day,
Lies worse, and, while it says we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possest.
Strange cozenage! none would live past years again,
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain,
And from the dregs of life think to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give.
I 'm tired of waiting for this chymic gold
Which fools us young and beggars us when old."

The "first sprightly running" of Dryden's vintage was, it must be confessed, a little muddy, if not beery; but if his own soil did not produce grapes of the choicest flavor, he knew where they were to be had; and his product, like sound wine, grew better the longer it stood upon the lees. He tells us, evidently thinking of himself, that in a poet, "from fifty to threescore, the balance generally holds even in our colder climates, for he loses not much in fancy, and judgment, which is the effect of observation, still increases. His succeeding years afford him little more than the stubble of his own harvest, yet, if his constitution be healthful, his mind may still retain a decent vigor, and the gleanings of that of Ephraim, in comparison with others, will surpass the vintage of Abiezer." [1] Since Chaucer, none of our poets has had a constitution more healthful, and it was his old age that yielded the best of him. In him the understanding was, perhaps, in overplus for his entire good fortune as a poet, and that is a faculty among the earliest to mature. We have seen him, at only ten years, divining the power of reason in Poly-

[1] Dedication of the *Georgics*.

bius.[1] The same turn of mind led him later to imitate the French school of tragedy, and to admire in Ben Jonson the most correct of English poets. It was his imagination that needed quickening, and it is very curious to trace through his different prefaces the gradual opening of his eyes to the causes of the solitary preëminence of Shakespeare. At first he is sensible of an attraction towards him which he cannot explain, and for which he apologizes, as if it were wrong. But he feels himself drawn more and more strongly, till at last he ceases to resist altogether, and is forced to acknowledge that there is something in this one man that is not and never was anywhere else, something not to be reasoned about, ineffable, divine; if contrary to the rules, so much the worse for *them*. It may be conjectured that Dryden's Puritan associations may have stood in the way of his more properly poetic culture, and that his early knowledge of Shakespeare was slight. He tells us that Davenant, whom he could not have known before he himself was twenty-seven, first taught him to admire the great poet.[2] But even after his imagination had become conscious of its prerogative, and his expression had been ennobled by frequenting this higher society, we find him continually dropping back into that *sermo pedestris* which seems, on the whole, to have been his more natural

[1] Dryden's penetration is always remarkable. His general judgment of Polybius coincides remarkably with that of Mommsen. (*Röm. Gesch.* ii. 448, *seq.*)

[2] Preface to the *Tempest*. He helped Davenant to vulgarize this play.

element. We always feel his epoch in him, and that he was the lock which let our language down from its point of highest poetry to its level of easiest and most gently flowing prose. His enthusiasm needs the contagion of other minds to arouse it; but his strong sense, his command of the happy word, his wit, which is distinguished by a certain breadth and, as it were, power of generalization, as Pope's by keenness of edge and point, were his, whether he would or no. Accordingly, his poetry is often best and his verse more flowing where (as in parts of his version of the twenty-ninth ode of the third book of Horace) he is amplifying the suggestions of another mind.[1] Viewed from one side, he justifies Milton's remark of him, that "he was a good rhymist, but no poet." To look at all sides, and to distrust the verdict of a single mood, is, no doubt, the duty of a critic. But how if a certain side be so often presented as to thrust forward in the memory and disturb it in the effort to recall that total impression (for the office of a critic is not, though often so misunderstood, to say *guilty* or *not guilty* of some particular fact) which is the only safe ground of judgment? It is the weight of the whole man, not of one or the other limb of

[1] "I have taken some pains to make it my masterpiece in English." Preface to *Second Miscellany*. Fox said that it "was better than the original." J. C. Scaliger said of Erasmus: "Ex alieno ingenio poeta, ex suo versificator." Fox indeed preferred the Ode to Fortune above its Horatian original. Dryden has certainly let out a reef or two and given a fuller sail to the verse. But the elegance? The restrained rather than bellying expanse of phrase? The perfect adequacy without excess?

him, that we want. *Expende Hannibalem.* Very good, but not in a scale capacious only of a single quality at a time, for it is their union, and not their addition, that assures the value of each separately. It was not this or that which gave him his weight in council, his swiftness of decision in battle that outran the forethought of other men, — it was Hannibal. But this prosaic element in Dryden will force itself upon me. As I read him, I cannot help thinking of an ostrich, to be classed with flying things, and capable, what with leap and flap together, of leaving the earth for a longer or shorter space, but loving the open plain, where wing and foot help each other to something that is both flight and run at once. What with his haste and a certain dash, which, according to our mood, we may call florid or splendid, he seems to stand among poets where Rubens does among painters, — greater, perhaps, as a colorist than an artist, yet great here also, if we compare him with any but the first.

We have arrived at Dryden's thirty-second year, and thus far have found little in him to warrant an augury that he was ever to be one of the *great* names in English literature, the most perfect type, that is, of his class, and that class a high one, though not the highest. If Joseph de Maistre's axiom, *Qui n'a pas vaincu à trente ans, ne vaincra jamais*, were quite true, there would be little hope of him, for he has won no battle yet. But there is something solid and doughty in the man, that can rise from defeat, the stuff of which victories are

made in due time, when we are able to choose our position better, and the sun is at our back. Hitherto his performances have been mainly of the *obbligato* sort, at which few men of original force are good, least of all Dryden, who had always something of stiffness in his strength. Waller had praised the living Cromwell in perhaps the manliest verses he ever wrote, — not *very* manly, to be sure, but really elegant, and, on the whole, better than those in which Dryden squeezed out melodious tears. Waller, who had also made himself conspicuous as a volunteer Antony to the country squire turned Cæsar,

> ("With ermine clad and purple, let him hold
> A royal sceptre made of Spanish gold,")

was more servile than Dryden in hailing the return of *ex officio* Majesty. He bewails to Charles, in snuffling heroics,

> "Our sorrow and our crime
> To have accepted life so long a time,
> Without you here."

A weak man, put to the test by rough and angry times, as Waller was, may be pitied, but meanness is nothing but contemptible under any circumstances. If it be true that "every conqueror creates a Muse," Cromwell was unfortunate. Even Milton's sonnet, though dignified, is reserved if not distrustful. Marvell's "Horatian Ode," the most truly classic in our language, is worthy of its theme. The same poet's Elegy, in parts noble, and everywhere humanly tender, is worth more than all Carlyle's biography as a witness to the gentler quali-

ties of the hero, and of the deep affection that stalwart nature could inspire in hearts of truly masculine temper. As it is little known, a few verses of it may be quoted to show the difference between grief that thinks of its object and grief that thinks of its rhymes: —

"Valor, religion, friendship, prudence died
At once with him, and all that 's good beside,
And we, death's refuse, nature's dregs, confined
To loathsome life, alas! are left behind,
Where we (so once we used) shall now no more,
To fetch day, press about his chamber-door,
No more shall hear that powerful language charm,
Whose force oft spared the labor of his arm,
No more shall follow where he spent the days
In war or counsel, or in prayer and praise.
. . . . . .
I saw him dead; a leaden slumber lies,
And mortal sleep, over those wakeful eyes;
Those gentle rays under the lids were fled,
Which through his looks that piercing sweetness shed;
That port, which so majestic was and strong,
Loose and deprived of vigor stretched along,
All withered, all discolored, pale, and wan,
How much another thing! no more That Man!
O human glory! vain! O death! O wings!
O worthless world! O transitory things!
Yet dwelt that greatness in his shape decayed
That still, though dead, greater than Death he laid,
And, in his altered face, you something feign
That threatens Death he yet will live again."

Such verses might not satisfy Lindley Murray, but they are of that higher mood which satisfies the heart. These couplets, too, have an energy worthy of Milton's friend: —

"When up the armëd mountains of Dunbar
He marched, and through deep Severn, ending war."

> " Thee, many ages hence, in martial verse
> Shall the English soldier, ere he charge, rehearse."

On the whole, one is glad that Dryden's panegyric on the Protector was so poor. It was purely official verse-making. Had there been any feeling in it, there had been baseness in his address to Charles. As it is, we may fairly assume that he was so far sincere in both cases as to be thankful for a chance to exercise himself in rhyme, without much caring whether upon a funeral or a restoration. He might naturally enough expect that poetry would have a better chance under Charles than under Cromwell, or any successor with Commonwealth principles. Cromwell had more serious matters to think about than verses, while Charles might at least care as much about them as it was in his base good-nature to care about anything but loose women and spaniels. Dryden's sound sense, afterwards so conspicuous, shows itself even in these pieces, when we can get at it through the tangled thicket of tropical phrase. But the authentic and unmistakable Dryden first manifests himself in some verses addressed to his friend Dr. Charlton in 1663. We have first his common sense which has almost the point of wit, yet with a tang of prose : —

> " The longest tyranny that ever swayed
> Was that wherein our ancestors betrayed
> Their freeborn reason to the Stagyrite,
> And made his torch their universal light.
> *So truth, while only one supplied the state,*
> *Grew scarce and dear and yet sophisticate.*
> *Still it was bought, like emp'ric wares or charms,*
> *Hard words sealed up with Aristotle's arms.*"

Then we have his easy plenitude of fancy, where he speaks of the inhabitants of the New World as

> "Guiltless men who danced away their time,
> Fresh as their groves and happy as their clime."

And, finally, there is a hint of imagination where "mighty visions of the Danish race" watch round Charles sheltered in Stonehenge after the battle of Worcester. These passages might have been written by the Dryden whom we learn to know fifteen years later. They have the advantage that he wrote them to please himself. His contemporary, Dr. Heylin, said of French cooks, that "their trade was not to feed the belly, but the palate." Dryden was a great while in learning this secret, as available in good writing as in cookery. He strove after it, but his thoroughly English nature, to the last, would too easily content itself with serving up the honest beef of his thought, without regard to daintiness of flavor in the dressing of it.[1] Of the best English poetry, it might be said that it is understanding aerated by imagination. In Dryden the solid part too often refused to mix kindly with the leaven, either remaining lumpish or rising to a

[1] In one of the last letters he ever wrote, thanking his cousin Mrs. Steward for a gift of marrow-puddings, he says: "A chine of honest bacon would please my appetite more than all the marrow-puddings; for I like them better plain, having a very vulgar stomach." So of Cowley he says: "There was plenty enough, but ill sorted, whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and women, but little of solid meat for men." The physical is a truer antitype of the spiritual man than we are willing to admit, and the brain is often forced to acknowledge the inconvenient country-cousinship of the stomach.

hasty puffiness. Grace and lightness were with him much more a laborious achievement than a natural gift, and it is all the more remarkable that he should so often have attained to what seems such an easy perfection in both. Always a hasty writer,[1] he was long in forming his style, and to the last was apt to snatch the readiest word rather than wait for the fittest. He was not wholly and unconsciously poet, but a thinker who sometimes lost himself on enchanted ground and was transfigured by its touch. This preponderance in him of the reasoning over the intuitive faculties, the one always there, the other flashing in when you least expect it, accounts for that inequality and even incongruousness in his writing which makes one revise one's judgment at every tenth page. In his prose you come upon passages that persuade you he is a poet, in spite of his verses so often turning state's evidence against him as to convince you he is none. He is a prose-writer, with a kind of Æolian attachment. For example, take this bit of prose from the dedication of his version of Virgil's Pastorals, 1694: "He found the strength of his genius betimes, and was even in his youth preluding to his Georgicks and his Æneis. He could not forbear to try his wings, though his pinions were not hardened

[1] In his preface to *All for Love*, he says, evidently alluding to himself: "If he have a friend whose hastiness in writing is his greatest fault, Horace would have taught him to have minced the matter, and to have called it readiness of thought and a flowing fancy." And in the Preface to the *Fables* he says of Homer: "This vehemence of his, I confess, is more suitable to my temper." He makes other allusions to it.

to maintain a long, laborious flight; yet sometimes they bore him to a pitch as lofty as ever he was able to reach afterwards. But when he was admonished by his subject to descend, he came down gently circling in the air and singing to the ground, like a lark melodious in her mounting and continuing her song till she alights, still preparing for a higher flight at her next sally, and tuning her voice to better music." This is charming, and yet even this wants the ethereal tincture that pervades the style of Jeremy Taylor, making it, as Burke said of Sheridan's eloquence, "neither prose nor poetry, but something better than either." Let us compare Taylor's treatment of the same image, which, I fancy, Dryden must have seen: "For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back by the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion of an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below." Taylor's fault is that his sentences too often smell of the library, but what an open air is here! How unpremeditated it all seems! How carelessly he knots each new thought,

as it comes to the one before it with an *and*, like a girl making lace! And what a slidingly musical use he makes of the sibilants with which our language is unjustly taxed by those who can only make them hiss, not sing! There are twelve of them in the first twenty words, fifteen of which are monosyllables. We notice the structure of Dryden's periods, but this grows up as we read. It gushes, like the song of the bird itself, —

> "In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

Let us now take a specimen of Dryden's bad prose from one of his poems. I open the "Annus Mirabilis" at random, and hit upon this: —

> "Our little fleet was now engaged so far,
> That, like the swordfish in the whale, they fought:
> The combat only seemed a civil war,
> Till through their bowels we our passage wrought."

Is this Dryden, or Sternhold, or Shadwell, those Toms who made him say that "dulness was fatal to the name of Tom"? The natural history of Goldsmith in the verse of Pye! His thoughts did not "voluntary move harmonious numbers." He had his choice between prose and verse, and seems to be poetical on second thought. I do not speak without book. He was more than half conscious of it himself. In the same letter to Mrs. Steward, just cited, he says, "I am still drudging on, always a poet and never a good one"; and this from no mock-modesty, for he is always handsomely frank in telling us whatever of his own doing pleased him. This was written in the last year of his life, and at about the same time he says elsewhere:

"What judgment I had increases rather than diminishes, and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse or to give them the other harmony of prose; I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit and become familiar to me."[1] I think that a man who was primarily a poet would hardly have felt this equanimity of choice.

I find a confirmation of this feeling about Dryden in his early literary loves. His taste was not an instinct, but the slow result of reflection and of the manfulness with which he always acknowledged to himself his own mistakes. In this latter respect few men deal so magnanimously with themselves as he, and accordingly few have been so happily inconsistent. *Ancora imparo* might have served him for a motto as well as Michel Angelo. His prefaces are a complete log of his life, and the habit of writing them was a useful one to him, for it forced him to think with a pen in his hand, which, according to Goethe, "if it do no other good, keeps the mind from staggering about." In these prefaces we see his taste gradually rising from Du Bartas to Spenser, from Cowley to Milton, from Corneille to Shakespeare. "I remember when I was a boy," he says in his dedication of the "Spanish Friar," 1681, "I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's Du Bartas, and was rapt into an ecstasy when I read these lines: —

[1] Preface to the *Fables*.

> 'Now when the winter's keener breath began
> To crystallize the Baltic ocean,
> To glaze the lakes, to bridle up the floods,
> And periwig with snow[1] the baldpate woods.'

I am much deceived if this be not abominable fustian." Swift, in his "Tale of a Tub," has a ludicrous passage in this style: "Look on this globe of earth, you will find it to be a very complete and fashionable dress. What is that which some call *land*, but a fine coat faced with green? or the *sea*, but a waistcoat of water-tabby? Proceed to the particular works of creation, you will find how curious journeyman Nature has been to trim up the vegetable *beaux;* observe how *sparkish a periwig adorns the head of a beech*, and what a fine doublet of white satin is worn by the birch." The fault is not in any inaptness of the images, nor in the mere vulgarity of the things themselves, but in that of the associations they awaken. The "prithee, undo this button" of Lear, coming where it does and expressing what it does, is one of those touches of the pathetically sublime, of which only Shakespeare ever knew the secret. Herrick, too, has a charming poem on "Julia's petticoat," the charm being that he exalts the familiar and the low to the region of sentiment. In the passage from Sylves-

[1] *Wool* is Sylvester's word. Dryden reminds us of Burke in this also, that he always quotes from memory and seldom exactly. His memory was better for things than for words. This helps to explain the length of time it took him to master that vocabulary at last so various, full, and seemingly extemporaneous. He is a large quoter, though, with his usual inconsistency, he says, "I am no admirer of quotations." (*Essay on Heroic Plays.*)

ter, it is precisely the reverse, and the wig takes as much from the sentiment as it adds to a Lord Chancellor. So Pope's proverbial verse,

"True wit is Nature to advantage drest,"

unpleasantly suggests Nature under the hands of a lady's-maid.[1] We have no word in English that will exactly define this want of propriety in diction. *Vulgar* is too strong, and *commonplace* too weak. Perhaps *bourgeois* comes as near as any. It is to be noticed that Dryden does not unequivocally condemn the passage he quotes, but qualifies it with an "if I am not much mistaken." Indeed, though his judgment in substantials, like that of Johnson, is always worth having, his taste, the negative half of genius, never altogether refined itself from a colloquial familiarity, which is one of the charms of his prose, and gives that air of easy strength in which his satire is unmatched. In his "Royal Martyr" (1669), the tyrant Maximin says to the gods: —

"Keep you your rain and sunshine in the skies,
And I 'll keep back my flame and sacrifice;
Your trade of Heaven shall soon be at a stand,
And all your goods lie dead upon your hand," —

a passage which has as many faults as only Dryden was capable of committing, even to a false idiom forced by the last rhyme. The same tyrant in dying exclaims: —

[1] In the *Epimetheus* of a poet usually as elegant as Gray himself, one's finer sense is a little jarred by the

"Spectral gleam their snow-white *dresses*."

"And after thee I 'll go,
Revenging still, and following e'en to th' other world my blow,
And, *shoving back this earth on which I sit,*
I 'll mount and scatter all the gods I hit."

In the "Conquest of Granada" (1670), we have:

"This little loss in our vast body shews
So small, that half *have never heard the news;*
Fame 's out of breath e'er she can fly so far
To tell 'em all that you have e'er made war." [1]

And in the same play,

"That busy thing,
The soul, is packing up, and just on wing
Like parting swallows when they seek the spring,"

where the last sweet verse curiously illustrates that inequality (poetry on a prose background) which so often puzzles us in Dryden. Infinitely worse is the speech of Almanzor to his mother's ghost: —

"I 'll rush into the covert of the night
And pull thee backward by the shroud to light,
Or else I 'll squeeze thee like a bladder there,
And make thee groan thyself away to air."

What wonder that Dryden should have been substituted for Davenant as the butt of the "Rehearsal," and that the parody should have had such a run? And yet it was Dryden who, in speaking of Persius, hit upon the happy phrase of "boister-

[1] This probably suggested to Young the grandiose image in his *Last Day* (B. ii.): —

"Those overwhelming armies . . .
Whose rear lay wrapt in night, while breaking dawn
Roused the broad front and called the battle on."

This, to be sure, is no plagiarism; but it should be carried to Dryden's credit that we catch the poets of the next half-century oftener with their hands in his pockets than in those of any one else.

ous metaphors"; [1] it was Dryden who said of Cowley, whom he elsewhere calls "the darling of my youth," [2] that he was "sunk in reputation because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way, but swept, like a drag-net, great and small." [3] But the passages I have thus far cited as specimens of our poet's coarseness (for poet he surely was *intus*, though not always *in cute*) were written before he was forty, and he had an odd notion, suitable to his healthy complexion, that poets on the whole improve after that date. Man at forty, he says, "seems to be fully in his summer tropic, . . . and I believe that it will hold in all great poets that, though they wrote before with a

[1] *Essay on Satire.*

[2] Ibid.

[3] Preface to *Fables.* Men are always inclined to revenge themselves on their old idols in the first enthusiasm of conversion to a purer faith. Cowley had all the faults that Dryden loads him with, and yet his popularity was to some extent deserved. He at least had a theory that poetry should soar, not creep, and longed for some expedient, in the failure of natural wings, by which he could lift himself away from the conventional and commonplace. By beating out the substance of Pindar very thin, he contrived a kind of balloon which, tumid with gas, did certainly mount a little, *into* the clouds, if not above them, though sure to come suddenly down with a bump. His odes, indeed, are an alternation of upward jerks and concussions, and smack more of Chapelain than of the Theban, but his prose is very agreeable, — Montaigne and water, perhaps, but with some flavor of the Gascon wine left. The strophe of his ode to Dr. Scarborough, in which he compares his surgical friend, operating for the stone, to Moses striking the rock, more than justifies all the ill that Dryden could lay at his door. It was into precisely such mud-holes that Cowley's Will-o'-the-Wisp had misguided him. Men may never wholly shake off a vice but they are always conscious of it, and hate the tempter.

certain heat of genius which inspired them, yet that heat was not perfectly digested."[1] But artificial heat is never to be digested at all, as is plain in Dryden's case. He was a man who warmed slowly, and, in his hurry to supply the market, forced his mind. The result was the same after forty as before. In "Œdipus" (1679) we find,

> "Not one bolt
> Shall err from Thebes, but more be called for, more,
> *New-moulded thunder of a larger size!*"

This play was written in conjunction with Lee, of whom Dryden relates[2] that, when some one said to him, "It is easy enough to write like a madman," he replied, "No, it is hard to write like a madman, but easy enough to write like a fool," — perhaps the most compendious lecture on poetry ever delivered. The splendid bit of eloquence, which has so much the sheet-iron clang of impeachment thunder (I hope that Dryden is not in the Library of Congress!) is perhaps Lee's. The following passage almost certainly is his: —

> "Sure 't is the end of all things! Fate has torn
> The lock of Time off, and his head is now
> The ghastly ball of round Eternity!"

But the next, in which the soul is likened to the pocket of an indignant housemaid charged with theft, is wholly in Dryden's manner: —

> "No; I dare challenge heaven to turn me outward,
> And shake my soul quite empty in your sight."

In the same style, he makes his Don Sebastian

[1] Dedication of *Georgics*.
[2] In a letter to Dennis, 1693.

(1690) say that he is as much astonished as "drowsy mortals" at the last trump,

> "When, called in haste, *they fumble for their limbs*,"

and propose to take upon himself the whole of a crime shared with another by asking Heaven *to charge the bill* on him. And in "King Arthur," written ten years after the Preface from which I have quoted his confession about Du Bartas, we have a passage precisely of the kind he condemned: —

> "Ah for the many souls as but this morn
> Were clothed with flesh and warmed with vital blood,
> But naked now, or *shirted* but with air."

Dryden too often violated his own admirable rule, that "an author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought." [1] In his worst images, however, there is often a vividness that half excuses them. But it is a grotesque vividness, as from the flare of a bonfire. They do not flash into sudden lustre, as in the great poets, where the imaginations of poet and reader leap toward each other and meet half-way.

English prose is indebted to Dryden for having freed it from the cloister of pedantry. He, more than any other single writer, contributed, as well by precept as example, to give it suppleness of movement and the easier air of the modern world. His own style, juicy with proverbial phrases, has that familiar dignity, so hard to attain, perhaps unattainable except by one who, like Dryden, feels that his position is assured. Charles Cotton is as easy, but not so elegant; Walton as familiar, but

[1] Preface to *Fables*.

not so flowing; Swift as idiomatic, but not so elevated; Burke more splendid, but not so equally luminous. That his style was no easy acquisition (though, of course, the aptitude was innate) he himself tells us. In his dedication of "Troilus and Cressida" (1679), where he seems to hint at the erection of an Academy, he says that "the perfect knowledge of a tongue was never attained by any single person. The Court, the College, and the Town must all be joined in it. And as our English is a composition of the dead and living tongues, there is required a perfect knowledge, not only of the Greek and Latin, but of the Old German, French, and Italian, and to help all these, a conversation with those authors of our own who have written with the fewest faults in prose and verse. But how barbarously we yet write and speak your Lordship knows, and I am sufficiently sensible in my own English.[1] For I am often put to a stand in considering whether what I write be the idiom of the tongue, or false grammar and nonsense couched beneath that specious name of *Anglicism*, and have no other way to clear my doubts but by translating my English into Latin, and thereby trying what sense the words will bear in a more stable language." *Tantæ molis erat.* Five years

[1] More than half a century later, Orrery, in his "Remarks" on Swift, says: "We speak and we write at random; and if a man's common conversation were committed to paper, he would be startled *for to* find himself guilty in *so few* sentences of so many solecisms and such false English." I do not remember *for to* anywhere in Dryden's prose. *So few* has long been denizened; no wonder, since it is nothing more than *si peu* Anglicized.

later: "The proprieties and delicacies of the English are known to few; it is impossible even for a good wit to understand and practise them without the help of a liberal education, long reading and digesting of those few good authors we have amongst us, the knowledge of men and manners, *the freedom of habitudes and conversation with the best company of both sexes*, and, in short, without wearing off the rust which he contracted while he was laying in a stock of learning." In the passage I have italicized, it will be seen that Dryden lays some stress upon the influence of women in refining language. Swift, also, in his plan for an Academy, says: "Now, though I would by no means give the ladies the trouble of advising us in the reformation of our language, yet I cannot help thinking that, since they have been left out of all meetings except parties at play, or where worse designs are carried on, our conversation has very much degenerated." [1] Swift affirms that the language had grown corrupt since the Restoration, and that "the Court, which used to be the standard of propriety and correctness of speech, was then, and, I think, has ever since continued, the worst school in England." [2]

[1] Letter to the Lord High Treasurer.

[2] Ibid. He complains of "manglings and abbreviations." "What does your Lordship think of the words drudg'd, disturb'd, rebuk'd, fledg'd, and a thousand others?" In a contribution to the *Tatler* (No. 230) he ridicules the use of *'um* for *them*, and a number of slang phrases, among which is *mob*. "The war," he says, "has introduced abundance of polysyllables, which will never be able to live many more campaigns." *Speculations*, *operations*, *preliminaries*, *ambassadors*, *pallisadoes*, *communication*, *circumvallation*, *battalions*, are the instances he gives, and all are now familiar. No

He lays the blame partly on the general licentiousness, partly upon the French education of many of Charles's courtiers, and partly on the poets. Dryden undoubtedly formed his diction by the usage of the Court. The age was a very free-and-easy, not to say a very coarse one. Its coarseness was not external, like that of Elizabeth's day, but the outward mark of an inward depravity. What Swift's notion of the refinement of women was may be judged by his anecdotes of Stella. I will not say that Dryden's prose did not gain by the conversational elasticity which his frequenting men and women of the world enabled him to give it. It is the best specimen of every-day style that we have. But the habitual dwelling of his mind in a commonplace atmosphere, and among those easy levels of sentiment which befitted Will's Coffee-house and the Bird-cage Walk, was a damage to his poetry. Solitude is as needful to the imagination as society is wholesome for the character. He cannot always

man, or body of men, can dam the stream of language. Dryden is rather fond of *'em* for *them*, but uses it rarely in his prose. Swift himself prefers *'t is* to *it is*, as does Emerson still. In what Swift says of the poets, he may be fairly suspected of glancing at Dryden, who was his kinsman, and whose prefaces and translation of Virgil he ridicules in the *Tale of a Tub*. Dryden is reported to have said of him, "Cousin Swift is no poet." The Dean began his literary career by Pindaric odes to Athenian Societies and the like, — perhaps the greatest mistake as to his own powers of which an author was ever guilty. It was very likely that he would send these to his relative, already distinguished, for his opinion upon them. If this was so, the justice of Dryden's judgment must have added to the smart. Swift never forgot or forgave; Dryden was careless enough to do the one, and large enough to do the other.

distinguish between enthusiasm and extravagance when he sees them. But apart from these influences which I have adduced in exculpation, there was certainly a vein of coarseness in him, a want of that exquisite sensitiveness which is the conscience of the artist. An old gentleman, writing to the Gentleman's Magazine in 1745, professes to remember "plain John Dryden (before he paid his court with success to the great) in one uniform clothing of Norwich drugget. I have eat tarts at the Mulberry Garden with him and Madam Reeve, when our author advanced to a sword and Chadreux wig." [1] I always fancy Dryden in the drugget, with wig, lace ruffles, and sword superimposed. It is the type of this curiously incongruous man.

The first poem by which Dryden won a general acknowledgment of his power was the "Annus Mirabilis," written in his thirty-seventh year. Pepys, himself not altogether a bad judge, doubt-

[1] Both Malone and Scott accept this gentleman's evidence without question, but I confess suspicion of a memory that runs back more than eighty-one years, and recollects a man before he had any claim to remembrance. Dryden was never poor, and there is at Oxford a portrait of him painted in 1664, which represents him in a superb periwig and laced band. This was "before he had paid his court with success to the great." But the story is at least *ben trovato*, and morally true enough to serve as an illustration. Who the "old gentleman" was has never been discovered. Of Crowne (who has some interest for us as a sometime student at Harvard) he says: "Many a cup of metheglin have I drank with little starch'd Johnny Crown; we called him so, from the stiff, unalterable primness of his long cravat." Crowne reflects no more credit on his Alma Mater than Downing. Both were sneaks, and of such a kind as, I think, can only be produced by a debauched Puritanism. Crowne, as a rival of Dryden, is contemptuously alluded to by Cibber in his *Apology*.

less expresses the common opinion when he says: "I am very well pleased this night with reading a poem I brought home with me last night from Westminster Hall, of Dryden's, upon the present war; a very good poem."[1] And a very good poem, in some sort, it continues to be, in spite of its amazing blemishes. We must always bear in mind that Dryden lived in an age that supplied him with no ready-made inspiration, and that big phrases and images are apt to be pressed into the service when great ones do not volunteer. With this poem begins the long series of Dryden's prefaces, of which Swift made such excellent, though malicious, fun that I cannot forbear to quote it. "I do utterly disapprove and declare against that pernicious custom of making the *preface* a bill of fare to the book. For I have always looked upon it as a high point of indiscretion in monster-mongers and other retailers of strange sights to hang out a fair picture over the door, drawn after the life, with a most eloquent description underneath; this has saved me many a threepence. . . . Such is exactly the fate at this time of *prefaces*. . . . This expedient was admirable at first; our great Dryden has long carried it as far as it would go, and with incredible success. He has often said to me in confidence, 'that the world would never have suspected him to be so great a poet, if he had not assured

[1] *Diary*, iii. 390. Almost the only notices of Dryden that make him alive to me I have found in the delicious book of this Polonius-Montaigne, the only man who ever had the courage to keep a sincere journal, even under the shelter of cipher.

them so frequently, in his prefaces, that it was impossible they could either doubt or forget it.' Perhaps it may be so; however, I much fear his instructions have edified out of their place, and taught men to grow wiser in certain points where he never intended they should."[1] The *monster-mongers* is a terrible thrust, when we remember some of the comedies and heroic plays which Dryden ushered in this fashion. In the dedication of the "Annus" to the city of London is one of those pithy sentences of which Dryden is ever afterwards so full, and which he lets fall with a carelessness that seems always to deepen the meaning: "I have heard, indeed, of some virtuous persons who have ended unfortunately, but never of any virtuous nation; Providence is engaged too deeply when the cause becomes so general." In his "account" of the poem in a letter to Sir Robert Howard he says: "I have chosen to write my poem in quatrains or stanzas of four in alternate rhyme, because I have ever judged them more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us. . . . The learned languages have certainly a great advantage of us in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme. . . . But in this necessity of our rhymes, I have always found the couplet verse most easy, though not so proper for this occasion; for there the work is sooner at an end, every two lines concluding the

[1] *Tale of a Tub*, Sect. V. Pepys also speaks of buying the *Maiden Queen* of Mr. Dryden's, which he himself, in his preface, seems to brag of, and indeed is a good play. — 18th January, 1668.

labor of the poet." A little further on: "They [the French] write in alexandrines, or verses of six feet, such as amongst us is the old translation of Homer by Chapman: all which, by lengthening their chain,[1] makes the sphere of their activity the greater." I have quoted these passages because, in a small compass, they include several things characteristic of Dryden. "I have ever judged," and "I have always found," are particularly so. If he took up an opinion in the morning, he would have found so many arguments for it before night that it would seem already old and familiar. So with his reproach of rhyme; a year or two before he was eagerly defending it;[2] again a few years, and he will utterly condemn and drop it in his plays, while retaining it in his translations; afterwards his study of Milton leads him to think that blank verse would suit the epic style better, and he proposes to try it with Homer, but at last trans-

[1] He is fond of this image. In the *Maiden Queen* Celadon tells Sabina that, when he is with her rival Florimel, his heart is still her prisoner, "it only draws a longer chain after it." Goldsmith's fancy was taken by it; and everybody admires in the "Traveller" the extraordinary conceit of a heart dragging a lengthening chain. The smoothness of too many rhymed pentameters is that of thin ice over shallow water; so long as we glide along rapidly, all is well; but if we dwell a moment on any one spot, we may find ourselves knee-deep in mud. A later poet, in trying to improve on Goldsmith, shows the ludicrousness of the image: —

"And round my heart's leg ties its galling chain."

To write imaginatively a man should have — imagination!

[2] See his epistle dedicatory to the *Rival Ladies* (1664). For the other side, see particularly a passage in his *Discourse on Epic Poetry* (1697).

lates one book as a specimen, and behold, it is in rhyme! But the charm of this great advocate is, that, whatever side he was on, he could always find excellent reasons for it, and state them with great force and abundance of happy illustration. He is an exception to the proverb, and is none the worse pleader that he is always pleading his own cause. The blunder about Chapman is of a kind into which his hasty temperament often betrayed him. He remembered that Chapman's "Iliad" was in a long measure, concluded without looking that it was alexandrine, and then attributes it generally to his "Homer." Chapman's "Iliad" is done in fourteen-syllable verse, and his "Odyssee" in the very metre that Dryden himself used in his own version.[1] I remark also what he says of the couplet, that it was easy because the second verse concludes the labor of the poet. And yet it was Dryden who found it hard for that very reason. His vehement abundance refused those narrow banks, first running over into a triplet, and, even then uncontainable, rising to an alexandrine in the concluding verse. And I have little doubt that it was

[1] In the same way he had two years before assumed that Shakespeare "was the first who, to shun the pains of continued rhyming, invented that kind of writing which we call blank verse!" Dryden was never, I suspect, a very careful student of English literature. He seems never to have known that Surrey translated a part of the *Æneid* (and with great spirit) into blank verse. Indeed, he was not a scholar, in the proper sense of the word, but he had that faculty of rapid assimilation without study, so remarkable in Coleridge and other rich minds, whose office is rather to impregnate than to invent. These brokers of thought perform a great office in literature, second only to that of originators.

the roominess, rather than the dignity, of the quatrain which led him to choose it. As apposite to this, I may quote what he elsewhere says of octosyllabic verse: "The thought can turn itself with greater ease in a larger compass. When the rhyme comes too thick upon us, it straitens the expression: we are thinking of the close, when we should be employed in adorning the thought. It makes a poet giddy with turning in a space too narrow for his imagination."[1]

Dryden himself, as was not always the case with him, was well satisfied with his work. He calls it his best hitherto, and attributes his success to the excellence of his subject, "incomparably the best he had ever had, *excepting only the Royal Family*." The first part is devoted to the Dutch war; the last to the fire of London. The martial half is infinitely the better of the two. He altogether surpasses his model, Davenant. If his poem lack the gravity of thought attained by a few stanzas of "Gondibert," it is vastly superior in life, in picturesqueness, in the energy of single lines, and, above all, in imagination. Few men have read "Gondibert," and almost every one speaks of it, as commonly of the dead, with a certain subdued respect. And it deserves respect as an honest effort to bring poetry back to its highest office in the ideal treatment of life. Davenant emulated Spenser, and if his poem had been as good as his preface, it could

[1] *Essay on Satire.* What he has said just before this about Butler is worth noting. Butler had had a chief hand in the "Rehearsal," but Dryden had no grudges where the question was of giving its just praise to merit.

still be read in another spirit than that of investigation. As it is, it always reminds me of Goldsmith's famous verse. It is remote, unfriendly, solitary, and, above all, slow. Its shining passages, for there are such, remind one of distress-rockets sent up at intervals from a ship just about to founder, and sadden rather than cheer.[1]

The first part of the "Annus Mirabilis" is by no means clear of the false taste of the time,[2] though it has some of Dryden's manliest verses and happiest comparisons, always his two distinguishing merits. Here, as almost everywhere else in Dryden, measuring him merely as poet, we recall what he, with pathetic pride, says of himself in the prologue to "Aurengzebe": —

> "Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,
> The first of this, the hindmost of the last."

What can be worse than what he says of comets?

> "Whether they unctuous exhalations are
> Fired by the sun, or seeming so alone,
> Or each some more remote and slippery star
> Which loses footing when to mortals shown."

[1] The conclusion of the second canto of Book Third is the best continuously fine passage. Dryden's poem has nowhere so much meaning in so small space as Davenant, when he says of the sense of honor that,

> "Like Power, it grows to nothing, growing less."

Davenant took the hint of the stanza from Sir John Davies. Wyatt first used it, so far as I know, in English.

[2] Perhaps there is no better lecture on the prevailing vices of style and thought (if thought this frothy ferment of the mind may be called) than in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*. For Mather, like a true provincial, appropriates only the mannerism, and, as is usual in such cases, betrays all its weakness by the unconscious parody of exaggeration.

Or than this, of the destruction of the Dutch India ships? —

> "Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,
> And now their odors armed against them fly;
> Some preciously by shattered porcelain fall,
> And some by aromatic splinters die."

Dear Dr. Johnson had his doubts about Shakespeare, but here at least was poetry! This is one of the quatrains which he pronounces "worthy of our author." [1]

But Dryden himself has said that "a man who is resolved to praise an author with any appearance of justice must be sure to take him on the strongest side, and where he is least liable to exceptions." This is true also of one who wishes to measure an author fairly, for the higher wisdom of criticism lies in the capacity to admire.

> Leser, wie gefall ich dir?
> Leser, wie gefällst du mir?

are both fair questions, the answer to the first being more often involved in that to the second than is sometimes thought. The poet in Dryden was never more fully revealed than in such verses as these: —

[1] The Doctor was a capital judge of the substantial value of the goods he handled, but his judgment always seems that of the thumb and forefinger. For the shades, the disposition of colors, the beauty of the figures, he has as good as no sense whatever. The critical parts of his *Life of Dryden* seem to me the best of his writing in this kind. There is little to be gleaned after him. He had studied his author, which he seldom did, and his criticism is sympathetic, a thing still rarer with him. As illustrative of his own habits, his remarks on Dryden's reading are curious.

"And threatening France, placed like a painted Jove,[1]
Kept idle thunder in his lifted hand";

"Silent in smoke of cannon they come on";

"And his loud guns speak thick, like angry men";

"The vigorous seaman every port-hole plies,
And adds his heart to every gun he fires";

"And, though to me unknown, they sure fought well,
Whom Rupert led, and who were British born."

This is masculine writing, and yet it must be said that there is scarcely a quatrain in which the rhyme does not trip him into a platitude, and there are too many swaggering with that *expression forte d'un sentiment faible* which Voltaire condemns in Corneille, — a temptation to which Dryden always lay too invitingly open. But there are passages higher in kind than any I have cited, because they show imagination. Such are the verses in

[1] Perhaps the hint was given by a phrase of Corneille, *monarque en peinture*. Dryden seldom borrows, unless from Shakespeare, without improving, and he borrowed a great deal. Thus in *Don Sebastian* (of suicide): —

"Brutus and Cato might discharge their souls,
And give them furloughs for the other world;
But we, like sentries, are obliged to stand
In starless nights and wait the appointed hour."

The thought is Cicero's, but how it is intensified by the "starless nights"! Dryden, I suspect, got it from his favorite, Montaigne, who says, "Que nous ne pouvons abandonner cette garnison du monde, sans le commandement exprez de celuy qui nous y a mis." (L. ii. chap. 3.) In the same play, by a very Drydenish verse, he gives new force to an old comparison: —

"And I should break through laws divine and human,
And think 'em cobwebs spread for little man,
Which all the bulky herd of Nature breaks."

which he describes the dreams of the disheartened enemy: —

> "In dreams they fearful precipices tread,
> Or, shipwrecked, labor to some distant shore,
> Or in dark churches walk among the dead";

and those in which he recalls glorious memories, and sees where

> "The mighty ghosts of our great Harries rose,
> And armëd Edwards looked with anxious eyes."

A few verses, like the pleasantly alliterative one in which he makes the spider, "from the silent ambush of his den," "feel far off the trembling of his thread," show that he was beginning to study the niceties of verse, instead of trusting wholly to what he would have called his natural *fougue*. On the whole, this part of the poem is very good war poetry, as war poetry goes (for there is but one first-rate poem of the kind in English, — short, national, eager as if the writer were personally engaged, with the rapid metre of a drum beating the charge, — and that is Drayton's "Battle of Agincourt" [1]), but it shows more study of Lucan than of Virgil, and for a long time yet we shall find Dryden bewildered by bad models. He is always imitating — no, that is not the word, always emulating — somebody in his more strictly poetical attempts, for in that direction he always needed some external impulse to set his mind in motion. This is more or less true of all authors; nor does it detract from their originality, which depends wholly on

[1] Not his solemn historical droning under that title, but addressed "To the Cambrio-Britons on their harp."

their being able so far to forget themselves as to let something of themselves slip into what they write.[1] In his prologue to Albumazar Dryden himself says of Ben Jonson, —

> "But Ben made nobly his what he did mould,
> What was another's lead becomes his gold."

The wise will call *mould* as good a euphemism as *convey!* Of absolute originality we will not speak till authors are raised by some Deucalion-and-Pyrrha process; and even then our faith would be small, for writers who have no past are pretty sure of having no future. Dryden, at any rate, always had to have his copy set him at the top of the page, and wrote ill or well accordingly. His mind (somewhat solid for a poet) warmed slowly, but, once fairly heated through, he had more of that good-luck of self-oblivion than most men. He certainly gave even a liberal interpretation to Molière's rule of taking his own property wherever he found it, though he sometimes blundered awkwardly about what was properly *his;* but in literature, it should be remembered, a thing always becomes his at last who says it best, and thus makes it his own.[2]

[1] "Les poëtes euxmêmes s'animent et s'échauffent par la lecture des autres poëtes. Messieurs de Malherbe, Corneille, &c., se disposoient au travail par la lecture des poëtes qui étoient de leur gout." — Vigneul-Marvilliana, i. 64, 65.

[2] For example, Waller had said,

> "Others may use the ocean as their road,
> Only the English *make it their abode;*
> . . . . . .
> We *tread on billows with a steady foot*," —

Mr. Savage Landor once told me that he said to Wordsworth: "Mr. Wordsworth, a man may mix poetry with prose as much as he pleases, and it will only elevate and enliven; but the moment he mixes a particle of prose with his poetry, it precipitates the whole." Wordsworth, he added, never forgave him. The always hasty Dryden, as I think I have already said, was liable, like a careless apothecary's 'prentice, to make the same confusion of ingredients, especially in the more mischievous way. I cannot leave the "Annus Mirabilis" without giving an example of this. Describing the Dutch prizes, rather like an auctioneer than a poet, he says that

> "Some English wool, vexed in a Belgian loom,
> And into cloth of spongy softness made,

long before Campbell. Campbell helps himself to both thoughts, enlivens them into

> "Her march is o'er the mountain wave,
> Her home is on the deep,"

and they are his forevermore. His "leviathans afloat" he *lifted* from the *Annus Mirabilis;* but in what court could Dryden sue? Again, Waller in another poem calls the Duke of York's flag

> "His dreadful streamer, like a comet's hair";

and this, I believe, is the first application of the celestial portent to this particular comparison. Yet Milton's "imperial ensign" waves defiant behind his impregnable lines, and even Campbell flaunts his "meteor flag" in Waller's face. Gray's bard might be sent to the lock-up, but even he would find bail.

> "C'est imiter quelqu'un que de planter des choux."

"The lyrical cry" which has lately become as iteratively tedious in the fields of criticism as that of the cicala in those of Italy may perhaps be traced to the "lyric-liring cries" of Sidney's *Arcadia.*

Did into France or colder Denmark doom,
To ruin with worse ware our staple trade."

One might fancy this written by the secretary of a board of trade in an unguarded moment; but we should remember that the poem is dedicated to the city of London. The depreciation of the rival fabrics is exquisite; and Dryden, the most English of our poets, would not be so thoroughly English if he had not in him some fibre of *la nation boutiquière*. Let us now see how he succeeds in attempting to infuse science (the most obstinately prosy material) with poetry. Speaking of "a more exact knowledge of the longitudes," as he explains in a note, he tells us that,

"Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go,
And view the ocean leaning on the sky;
From thence our rolling neighbors we shall know,
And on the lunar world securely pry."

Dr. Johnson confesses that he does not understand this. Why should he, when it is plain that Dryden was wholly in the dark himself? To understand it is none of my business, but I confess that it interests me as an Americanism. We have hitherto been credited as the inventors of the "jumping-off place" at the extreme western verge of the world. But Dryden was beforehand with us. Though he doubtless knew that the earth was a sphere (and perhaps that it was flattened at the poles), it was always a flat surface in his fancy. In his "Amphitryon," he makes Alcmena say: —

"No, I would fly thee to the ridge of earth,
And leap the precipice to 'scape thy sight."

And in his "Spanish Friar," Lorenzo says to Elvira that they "will travel together to the ridge of the world, and then drop together into the next." It is idle for us poor Yankees to hope that we can invent anything. To say sooth, if Dryden had left nothing behind him but the "Annus Mirabilis," he might have served as a type of the kind of poet America would have produced by the biggest-river-and-tallest-mountain recipe, — longitude and latitude in plenty, with marks of culture scattered here and there like the *carets* on a proof-sheet.

It is now time to say something of Dryden as a dramatist. In the thirty-two years between 1662 and 1694 he produced twenty-five plays, and assisted Lee in two. I have hinted that it took Dryden longer than most men to find the true bent of his genius. On a superficial view, he might almost seem to confirm that theory, maintained by Johnson, among others, that genius was nothing more than great intellectual power exercised persistently in some particular direction which chance decided, so that it lay in circumstance merely whether a man should turn out a Shakespeare or a Newton. But when we come to compare what he wrote, regardless of Minerva's averted face, with the spontaneous production of his happier muse, we shall be inclined to think his example one of the strongest cases against the theory in question. He began his dramatic career, as usual, by rowing against the strong current of his nature, and pulled only the more doggedly the more he felt himself swept down the stream. His first attempt was at com-

edy, and, though his earliest piece of that kind (the "Wild Gallant," 1663) utterly failed, he wrote eight others afterwards. On the 23d February, 1663, Pepys writes in his diary: "To Court, and there saw the 'Wild Gallant' performed by the king's house; but it was ill acted, and the play so poor a thing as I never saw in my life almost, and so little answering the name, that, from the beginning to the end, I could not, nor can at this time, tell certainly which was the Wild Gallant. The king did not seem pleased at all the whole play, nor anybody else." After some alteration, it was revived with more success. On its publication in 1669 Dryden honestly admitted its former failure, though with a kind of salvo for his self-love. "I made the town my judges, and the greater part condemned it. After which I do not think it my concernment to defend it with the ordinary zeal of a poet for his decried poem, though Corneille is more resolute in his preface before 'Pertharite,'[1] which was condemned more universally than this. . . . Yet it was received at Court, and was more than once the divertisement of his Majesty, by his own command." Pepys lets us amusingly behind the scenes in the matter of his Majesty's divertisement. Dryden does not seem to see that in the condemnation of something meant to amuse the public there can be no question of degree. To fail at all is to fail utterly.

[1] Corneille's tragedy of *Pertharite* was acted unsuccessfully in 1659. Racine made free use of it in his more fortunate *Andromaque*.

"Tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux."

In the reading, at least, all Dryden's comic writing for the stage must be ranked with the latter class. He himself would fain make an exception of the "Spanish Friar," but I confess that I rather wonder at than envy those who can be amused by it. His comedies lack everything that a comedy should have, — lightness, quickness of transition, unexpectedness of incident, easy cleverness of dialogue, and humorous contrast of character brought out by identity of situation. The comic parts of the "Maiden Queen" seem to me Dryden's best, but the merit even of these is Shakespeare's, and there is little choice where even the best is only tolerable. The common quality, however, of all Dryden's comedies is their nastiness, the more remarkable because we have ample evidence that he was a man of modest conversation. Pepys, who was by no means squeamish (for he found "Sir Martin Marall" "the most entire piece of mirth . . . that certainly ever was writ . . . very good wit therein, not fooling"), writes in his diary of the 19th June, 1668: "My wife and Deb to the king's playhouse to-day, thinking to spy me there, and saw the new play 'Evening Love,' of Dryden's, which, though the world commends, she likes not." The next day he saw it himself, "and do not like it, it being very smutty, and nothing so good as the 'Maiden Queen' or the 'Indian Emperor' of Dryden's making. *I was troubled at it.*" On the 22d he adds: "Calling this day at Herringman's,[1] he

[1] Dryden's publisher.

tells me Dryden do himself call it but a fifth-rate play." This was no doubt true, and yet, though Dryden in his preface to the play says, "I confess I have given [yielded] too much to the people in it, and am ashamed for them as well as for myself, that I have pleased them at so cheap a rate," he takes care to add, "not that there is anything here that I would not defend to an ill-natured judge." The plot was from Calderon, and the author, rebutting the charge of plagiarism, tells us that the king ("without whose command they should no longer be troubled with anything of mine") had already answered for him by saying, "that he only desired that they who accused me of theft would always steal him plays like mine."[1] Of the morals of the play he has not a word, nor do I believe that he was conscious of any harm in them till he was attacked by Collier, and then (with some protest against what he considers the undue severity of his censor) he had the manliness to confess that he had done wrong. "It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one."[2] And in a letter to his correspondent, Mrs. Thomas, written only a few weeks before his death, warning her against the example of Mrs. Behn, he says, with remorseful sincerity: "I confess I am the last man in the world who ought in justice to arraign her, who

[1] It is curious how good things repeat themselves. When General Grant was accused of drinking too much, Mr. Lincoln drily replied "That he wished all our generals might get hold of the same whiskey."

[2] Preface to the *Fables*.

have been myself too much a libertine in most of my poems, which I should be well contented I had time either to purge or to see them fairly burned." Congreve was less patient, and even Dryden, in the last epilogue he ever wrote, attempts an excuse: —

"Perhaps the Parson stretched a point too far,
When with our Theatres he waged a war;
He tells you that this very moral age
Received the first infection from the Stage,
But sure a banished Court, with lewdness fraught,
The seeds of open vice returning brought.
. . . . . .
Whitehall the naked Venus first revealed,
Who, standing, as at Cyprus, in her shrine,
The strumpet was adored with rites divine.
. . . . . .
The poets, who must live by courts or starve,
Were proud so good a Government to serve,
And, mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,
Tainted the Stage for some small snip of gain."

Dryden least of all men should have stooped to this palliation, for he had, not without justice, said of himself: "The same parts and application which have made me a poet might have raised me to any honors of the gown." Milton and Marvell neither lived by the Court, nor starved. Charles Lamb most ingeniously defends the Comedy of the Restoration as "the sanctuary and quiet Alsatia of hunted casuistry," where there was no pretence of representing a real world.[1] But this was certainly not so. Dryden again and again boasts of the su-

[1] I interpret some otherwise ambiguous passages in this charming and acute essay by its title: "On the *artificial* comedy of the last century."

perior advantage which his age had over that of the elder dramatists, in painting polite life, and attributes it to a greater freedom of intercourse between the poets and the frequenters of the Court.[1] We shall be less surprised at the *kind* of refinement upon which Dryden congratulated himself, when we learn (from the dedication of "Marriage à la Mode") that the Earl of Rochester was its exemplar: "The best comic writers of our age will join with me to acknowledge that they have copied the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behavior from your Lordship." In judging Dryden, it should be borne in mind that for some years he was under contract to deliver three plays a year, a kind of bond to which no man should subject his brain who has a decent respect for the quality of its products. We should remember, too, that in his day *manners* meant what we call *morals*, that custom always makes a larger part of virtue among average men than they are quite aware, and that the reaction from an outward conformity which had no root in inward faith may for a time have given to the frank expression of laxity an air of honesty that made it seem almost refreshing. There is no such hotbed for excess of license as excess of restraint, and the arrogant fanaticism of a single virtue is apt to make men suspicious of tyranny in all the rest. But the riot of emancipation could not last long, for the more tolerant society is of private

[1] See especially his defence of the epilogue to the Second Part of the *Conquest of Granada* (1672).

vice, the more exacting will it be of public decorum, that excellent thing, so often the plausible substitute for things more excellent. By 1678 the public mind had so far recovered its tone that Dryden's comedy of "Limberham" was barely tolerated for three nights. I will let the man who looked at human nature from more sides, and therefore judged it more gently than any other, give the only excuse possible for Dryden: —

> "Men's judgments are
> A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
> Do draw the inward quality after them
> To suffer all alike."

Dryden's own apology only makes matters worse for him by showing that he committed his offences with his eyes wide open, and that he wrote comedies so wholly in despite of nature as never to deviate into the comic. Failing as clown, he did not scruple to take on himself the office of Chiffinch to the palled appetite of the public. "For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents, and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy; I want that gayety of humour which is requisite to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved: In short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company or make repartees. So that those who decry my comedies do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: Reputation in them is the

last thing to which I shall pretend."[1] For my own part, though I have been forced to hold my nose in picking my way through these ordures of Dryden, I am free to say that I think them far less morally mischievous than that *corps-de-ballet* literature in which the most animal of the passions is made more temptingly naked by a veil of French gauze. Nor does Dryden's lewdness leave such a reek in the mind as the filthy cynicism of Swift, who delighted to uncover the nakedness of our common mother.

It is pleasant to follow Dryden into the more congenial region of heroic plays, though here also we find him making a false start. Anxious to please the king,[2] and so able a reasoner as to convince even himself of the justice of whatever cause he argued, he not only wrote tragedies in the French style, but defended his practice in an essay which is by far the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English. Eugenius (Lord Buckhurst), Lisideius (Sir Charles Sidley), Crites (Sir R. Howard), and Neander (Dryden) are the four partakers in the debate. The comparative merits of ancients and moderns, of the Shakespearian and contemporary drama, of rhyme and blank verse, the value of the three (supposed) Aristotelian unities, are the main topics

[1] *Defence of an Essay on Dramatick Poesy.*

[2] "The favor which heroick plays have lately found upon our theatres has been wholly derived to them from the countenance and approbation they have received at Court." (Dedication of *Indian Emperor* to Duchess of Monmouth.)

discussed. The tone of the discussion is admirable, midway between bookishness and talk, and the fairness with which each side of the argument is treated shows the breadth of Dryden's mind perhaps better than any other one piece of his writing. There are no men of straw set up to be knocked down again, as there commonly are in debates conducted upon this plan. The "Defence" of the Essay is to be taken as a supplement to Neander's share in it, as well as many scattered passages in subsequent prefaces and dedications. All the interlocutors agree that "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers," and that "our poesy is much improved by the happiness of some writers yet living, who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words, to retrench the superfluities of expression, and to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it." In another place he shows that by "living writers" he meant Waller and Denham. "Rhyme has all the advantages of prose besides its own. But the excellence and dignity of it were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it: he first made writing easily an art; first showed us to conclude the sense, most commonly in distiches, which in the verse before him runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it."[1] Dryden afterwards changed his mind, and one of the excellences of his own rhymed verse is, that his

[1] Dedication of *Rival Ladies*.

sense is too ample to be concluded by the distich. Rhyme had been censured as unnatural in dialogue; but Dryden replies that it is no more so than blank verse, since no man talks any kind of verse in real life. But the argument for rhyme is of another kind. "I am satisfied if it cause delight, for delight is the chief if not the only end of poesy [he should have said *means*]; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights. . . . The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poesy, and must be such as, strictly considered, could never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation. . . . Thus prose, though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed as too weak for the government of serious plays, and, he failing, there now start up two competitors; one the nearer in blood, which is blank verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him; but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing."[1] To the objection that the difficulties of rhyme will lead to circumlocution, he answers in substance, that a good poet will know how to avoid them.

[1] *Defence of the Essay.* Dryden, in the happiness of his illustrative comparisons, is almost unmatched. Like himself, they occupy a middle ground between poetry and prose, — they are a cross between metaphor and simile.

It is curious how long the superstition that Waller was the refiner of English verse has prevailed since Dryden first gave it vogue. He was a very poor poet and a purely mechanical versifier. He has lived mainly on the credit of his "Rose," of his "Girdle" (soiled with a vile pun), and of a single couplet,

> "The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made,"

in which the melody alone belongs to him, and the conceit, such as it is, to Samuel Daniel, who said, long before, that the body's

> "Walls, grown thin, permit the mind
> To look out thorough and his frailty find."

Waller has made worse nonsense of it in the transfusion. It might seem that Ben Jonson had a prophetic foreboding of him when he wrote: "Others there are that have no composition at all, but a kind of tuning and rhyming fall, in what they write. It runs and slides and only makes a sound. Women's poets they are called, as you have women's tailors.

> They write a verse as smooth, as soft, as cream
> In which there is no torrent, nor scarce stream.

You may sound these wits and find the depth of them with your middle-finger." [1] It seems to have been taken for granted by Waller, as afterwards by Dryden, that our elder poets bestowed no thought upon their verse. "Waller was smooth," but unhappily he was also flat, and his importation of the French theory of the couplet as a kind of thought-

[1] *Discoveries.*

coop did nothing but mischief.[1] He never compassed even a smoothness approaching this description of a nightingale's song by a third-rate poet of the earlier school, —

> "Trails her plain ditty in one long-spun note
> Through the sleek passage of her open throat,
> A clear, unwrinkled song," —

one of whose beauties is its running over into the third verse. Those poets indeed

> "Felt music's pulse in all her arteries";

and Dryden himself found out, when he came to try it, that blank verse was not so easy a thing as he at first conceived it, nay, that it is the most difficult of all verse, and that it must make up in harmony, by variety of pause and modulation, for what it loses in the melody of rhyme. In what makes the chief merit of his later versification, he but rediscovered the secret of his predecessors in giving to rhymed pentameters something of the freedom of blank verse, and not mistaking metre for rhythm.

Voltaire, in his Commentary on Corneille, has sufficiently lamented the awkwardness of move-

[1] What a wretched rhymer he could be we may see in his *alteration* of the *Maid's Tragedy* of Beaumont and Fletcher: —

> "Not long since walking in the field,
> My nurse and I, we there beheld
> A goodly fruit; which, tempting me,
> I would have plucked; but, trembling, she,
> Whoever eat those berries, cried,
> In less than half an hour died!"

What intolerable seesaw! Not much of Byron's "fatal facility" in *these* octosyllabics!

ment imposed upon the French dramatists by the gyves of rhyme. But he considers the necessity of overcoming this obstacle, on the whole, an advantage. Difficulty is his tenth and superior muse. How did Dryden, who says nearly the same thing, succeed in his attempt at the French manner? He fell into every one of its vices, without attaining much of what constitutes its excellence. From the nature of the language, all French poetry is purely artificial, and its high polish is all that keeps out decay. The length of their dramatic verse forces the French into much tautology, into bombast in its original meaning, the stuffing out a thought with words till it fills the line. The rigid system of their rhyme, which makes it much harder to manage than in English, has accustomed them to inaccuracies of thought which would shock them in prose. For example, in the "Cinna" of Corneille, as originally written, Emilie says to Augustus, —

"Ces flammes dans nos cœurs dès longtemps étoient nées,
Et ce sont des secrets de plus de quatre années."

I say nothing of the second verse, which is purely prosaic surplusage exacted by the rhyme, nor of the jingling together of *ces*, *dès*, *étoient*, *nées*, *des*, and *secrets*, but I confess that *nées* does not seem to be the epithet that Corneille would have chosen for *flammes*, if he could have had his own way, and that flames would seem of all things the hardest to keep secret. But in revising, Corneille changed the first verse thus,—

"Ces flammes dans nos cœurs *sans votre ordre* étoient nées."

Can anything be more absurd than flames born to order? Yet Voltaire, on his guard against these rhyming pitfalls for the sense, does not notice this in his minute comments on this play. Of extravagant metaphor, the result of this same making sound the file-leader of sense, a single example from "Heraclius" shall suffice: —

> "La vapeur de mon sang ira grossir la foudre
> Que Dieu tient déjà prête à le reduire en poudre."

One cannot think of a Louis Quatorze Apollo except in a full-bottomed periwig, and the tragic style of their poets is always showing the disastrous influence of that portentous comet. It is the *style perruque* in another than the French meaning of the phrase, and the skill lay in dressing it majestically, so that, as Cibber says, "upon the head of a man of sense, *if it became him*, it could never fail of drawing to him a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one." It did not become Dryden, and he left it off.[1]

Like his own Zimri, Dryden was "all for" this or that fancy, till he took up with another. But even while he was writing on French models, his judgment could not be blinded to their defects. "Look upon the 'Cinna' and the 'Pompey,' they are not so properly to be called plays as long discourses of reason of State, and 'Polieucte' in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs; . . . their actors speak by the hour-

[1] In more senses than one. His last and best portrait shows him in his own gray hair.

glass like our parsons. . . . I deny not but this may suit well enough with the French, for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious."[1] With what an air of innocent unconsciousness the sarcasm is driven home! Again, while he was still slaving at these bricks without straw, he says: "The present French poets are generally accused that, wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatever age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French. Racine's Bajazet is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage from Versailles into the Seraglio." It is curious that Voltaire, speaking of the *Bérénice* of Racine, praises a passage in it for precisely what Dryden condemns: "Il semble qu'on entende *Henriette* d'Angleterre elle-même parlant au marquis de *Vardes*. La politesse de la cour de *Louis XIV.*, l'agrément de la langue Française, la douceur de la versification la plus naturelle, le sentiment le plus tendre, tout se trouve dans ce peu de vers." After Dryden had broken away from the heroic style, he speaks out more plainly. In the Preface to his "All for Love," in reply to some cavils upon "little, and not essential decencies," the decision about which he refers to a master of ceremonies, he goes on to say: "The French poets, I confess, are strict observers of these punctilios; . . . in this nicety of manners does the excellency of French poetry consist. Their heroes

[1] *Essay on Dramatick Poesy.*

are the most civil people breathing, but their good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense. All their wit is in their ceremony; they want the genius which animates our stage, and therefore 't is but necessary, when they cannot please, that they should take care not to offend. . . . They are so careful not to exasperate a critic that they never leave him any work, . . . for no part of a poem is worth our discommending where the whole is insipid, as when we have once tasted palled wine we stay not to examine it glass by glass. But while they affect to shine in trifles, they are often careless in essentials. . . . For my part, I desire to be tried by the laws of my own country." This is said in heat, but it is plain enough that his mind was wholly changed. In his discourse on epic poetry he is as decided, but more temperate. He says that the French heroic verse " runs with more activity than strength.[1] Their language is not strung with sinews like our English; it has the nimbleness of a greyhound, but not the bulk and body of a mastiff. Our men and our verses overbear them by their weight, and *pondere, non numero*, is the British motto. The French have set

[1] A French hendecasyllable verse runs exactly like our ballad measure: —

A cobbler there was and he lived in a stall, . . .
La raison, pour marcher, n'a souvent qu'une voye.
(Dryden's note.)

The verse is not a hendecasyllable. " Attended watchfully to her recitative (Mlle. Duchesnois), and find that, in nine lines out of ten, 'A cobbler there was,' &c., *is* the tune of the French heroics." — *Moore's Diary*, 24th April, 1821.

up purity for the standard of their language, and a masculine vigor is that of ours. Like their tongue is the genius of their poets, — light and trifling in comparison of the English." [1]

Dryden might have profited by an admirable saying of his own, that "they who would combat general authority with particular opinion must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men." He understood the defects much better than the beauties of the French theatre. Lessing was even more one-sided in his judgment upon it.[2] Goethe, with his usual wisdom, studied it carefully without losing his temper, and tried to profit by its structural merits. Dryden, with his eyes wide open, copied its worst faults, especially its declamatory sentiment. He should have known that certain things can never be transplanted, and that among these is a style of poetry whose great excellence was that it was in perfect sympathy with the genius of the people among whom it came into being. But the truth is, that

[1] "The language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose." — Gray to West.

[2] Diderot and Rousseau, however, thought their language unfit for poetry, and Voltaire seems to have half agreed with them. No one has expressed this feeling more neatly than Fauriel: "Nul doute que l'on ne puisse dire en prose des choses éminemment poétiques, tout comme il n'est que trop certain que l'on peut en dire de fort prosaïques en vers, et même en excellents vers, en vers élégamment tournés, et en beau langage. C'est un fait dont je n'ai pas besoin d'indiquer d'exemples: aucune littérature n'en fournirait autant que le nôtre." — *Hist. de la Poésie Provençale*, ii. 237.

Dryden had no aptitude whatever for the stage, and in writing for it he was attempting to make a trade of his genius, — an arrangement from which the genius always withdraws in disgust. It was easier to make loose thinking and the bad writing which betrays it pass unobserved while the ear was occupied with the sonorous music of the rhyme to which they marched. Except in "All for Love," "the only play," he tells us, "which he wrote to please himself," [1] there is no trace of real passion in any of his tragedies. This, indeed, is inevitable, for there are no characters, but only personages, in any except that. That is, in many respects, a noble play, and there are few finer scenes, whether in the conception or the carrying out, than that between Antony and Ventidius in the first act.[2]

As usual, Dryden's good sense was not blind to the extravagances of his dramatic style. In "Mac Flecknoe" he makes his own Maximin the type of childish rant,

> "And little Maximins the gods defy";

but, as usual also, he could give a plausible reason for his own mistakes by means of that most fallacious of all fallacies which is true so far as it goes. In his Prologue to the "Royal Martyr" he says: —

> "And he who servilely creeps after sense
> Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence.
> . . . . . .

[1] *Parallel of Poetry and Painting.*

[2] "Il y a seulement la scène de *Ventidius* et d'*Antoine* qui est digne de Corneille. C'est là le sentiment de milord Bolingbroke et de tous les bons auteurs; c'est ainsi que pensait Addisson." — Voltaire to M. de Fromont, 15th November, 1735.

> But, when a tyrant for his theme he had,
> He loosed the reins and let his muse run mad,
> And, though he stumbles in a full career,
> Yet rashness is a better fault than fear;
> . . . . . .
> They then, who of each trip advantage take,
> Find out those faults which they want wit to make."

And in the Preface to the same play he tells us: "I have not everywhere observed the equality of numbers in my verse, partly by reason of my haste, but more especially because I *would not have my sense a slave to syllables.*" Dryden, when he had not a bad case to argue, would have had small respect for the wit whose skill lay in the making of faults, and has himself, where his self-love was not engaged, admirably defined the boundary which divides boldness from rashness. What Quintilian says of Seneca applies very aptly to Dryden: "Velles eum suo ingenio dixisse, alieno judicio."[1] He was thinking of himself, I fancy, when he makes Ventidius say of Antony, —

> "He starts out wide
> And bounds into a vice that bears him far
> From his first course, and plunges him in ills;
> But, when his danger makes him find his fault,
> Quick to observe, and full of sharp remorse,
> He censures eagerly his own misdeeds,
> Judging himself with malice to himself,
> And not forgiving what as man he did
> Because his other parts are more than man."

But bad though they nearly all are as wholes, his plays contain passages which only the great masters have surpassed, and to the level of which no

[1] *Inst.* X., i. 129.

subsequent writer for the stage has ever risen. The necessity of rhyme often forced him to a platitude, as where he says, —

> "My love was blind to your deluding art,
> But blind men feel when stabbed so near the heart."[1]

But even in rhyme he not seldom justifies his claim to the title of "glorious John." In the very play from which I have just quoted are these verses in his best manner: —

> "No, like his better Fortune I 'll appear,
> With open arms, loose veil, and flowing hair,
> Just flying forward from her rolling sphere."

His comparisons, as I have said, are almost always happy. This, from the "Indian Emperor," is tenderly pathetic: —

> "As callow birds,
> Whose mother 's killed in seeking of the prey,
> Cry in their nest and think her long away,
> And, at each leaf that stirs, each blast of wind,
> Gape for the food which they must never find."

And this, of the anger with which the Maiden Queen, striving to hide her jealousy, betrays her love, is vigorous: —

> "Her rage was love, and its tempestuous flame,
> Like lightning, showed the heaven from whence it came."

The following simile from the "Conquest of Granada" is as well expressed as it is apt in conception: —

> "I scarcely understand my own intent;
> But, silk-worm like, so long within have wrought,
> That I am lost in my own web of thought."

[1] *Conquest of Granada*, Second Part.

In the "Rival Ladies," Angelina, walking in the dark, describes her sensations naturally and strikingly: —

"No noise but what my footsteps make, and they
Sound dreadfully and louder than by day:
They double too, and every step I take
Sounds thick, methinks, and more than one could make."

In all the rhymed plays[1] there are many passages which one is rather inclined to like than sure he would be right in liking them. The following verses from "Aurengzebe" are of this sort: —

"My love was such it needed no return,
Rich in itself, like elemental fire,
Whose pureness does no aliment require."

This is Cowleyish, and *pureness* is surely the wrong word; and yet it is better than mere commonplace. Perhaps what oftenest turns the balance in Dryden's favor, when we are weighing his claims as a poet, is his persistent capability of enthusiasm. To the last he kindles, and sometimes *almost* flashes out that supernatural light which is the supreme test of poetic genius. As he himself so finely and characteristically says in "Aurengzebe," there was no period in his life when it was not true of him that

"He felt the inspiring heat, the absent god return."

The verses which follow are full of him, and, with the exception of the single word *underwent*, are in his luckiest manner: —

"One loose, one sally of a hero's soul,
Does all the military art control.

[1] In most, he mingles blank verse.

While timorous wit goes round, or fords the shore,
He shoots the gulf, and is already o'er,
And, when the enthusiastic fit is spent,
Looks back amazed at what he underwent." [1]

Pithy sentences and phrases always drop from Dryden's pen as if unawares, whether in prose or verse. I string together a few at random: —

"The greatest argument for love is love."

"Few know the use of life before 't is past."

"Time gives himself and is not valuëd."

"Death in itself is nothing; but we fear
To be we know not what, we know not where."

"Love either finds equality or makes it;
Like death, he knows no difference in degrees."

"That 's empire, that which I can give away."

"Yours is a soul irregularly great,
Which, wanting temper, yet abounds in heat."

"Forgiveness to the injured does belong,
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong."

"Poor women's thoughts are all extempore."

"The cause of love can never be assigned,
'T is in no face, but in the lover's mind." [2]

"Heaven can forgive a crime to penitence,
For Heaven can judge if penitence be true;
But man, who knows not hearts, should make examples."

"Kings' titles commonly begin by force,
Which time wears off and mellows into right."

"Fear 's a large promiser; who subject live
To that base passion, know not what they give."

[1] *Conquest of Granada.*

[2] This recalls a striking verse of Alfred de Musset: —

"La muse est toujours belle,
Même pour l'insensé, même pour l'impuissant,
Car sa beauté pour nous, c'est notre amour pour elle."

"The secret pleasure of the generous act
Is the great mind's great bribe."

"That bad thing, gold, buys all good things."

"Why, love does all that 's noble here below."

"To prove religion true,
If either wit or sufferings could suffice,
All faiths afford the constant and the wise."

But Dryden, as he tells us himself,

"Grew weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme;
Passion 's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
And Nature flies him like enchanted ground."

The finest things in his plays were written in blank verse, as vernacular to him as the alexandrine to the French. In this he vindicates his claim as a poet. His diction gets wings, and both his verse and his thought become capable of a reach which was denied them when set in the stocks of the couplet. The solid man becomes even airy in this new-found freedom: Antony says,

"How I loved,
Witness ye days and nights, and all ye hours
That *danced away with down upon your feet.*"

And what image was ever more delicately exquisite, what movement more fadingly accordant with the sense, than in the last two verses of the following passage?

"I feel death rising higher still and higher,
Within my bosom; every breath I fetch
Shuts up my life within a shorter compass,
And, like the vanishing sound of bells, grows less
And less each pulse, till it be lost in air." [1]

[1] *Rival Ladies.*

Nor was he altogether without pathos, though it is rare with him. The following passage seems to me tenderly full of it: —

> "Something like
> That voice methinks, I should have somewhere heard;
> But floods of woe have hurried it far off
> Beyond my ken of soul." [1]

And this single verse from "Aurengzebe": —

> "Live still! oh live! live even to be unkind!"

with its passionate eagerness and sobbing repetition, is worth a ship-load of the long-drawn treacle of modern self-compassion.

Now and then, to be sure, we come upon something that makes us hesitate again whether, after all, Dryden was not grandiose rather than great, as in the two passages that next follow: —

> "He looks secure of death, superior greatness,
> Like Jove when he made Fate and said, Thou art
> The slave of my creation." [2]

> "I 'm pleased with my own work; Jove was not more
> With infant nature, when his spacious hand
> Had rounded this huge ball of earth and seas,
> To give it the first push and see it roll
> Along the vast abyss." [3]

I should say that Dryden is more apt to dilate our fancy than our thought, as great poets have the gift of doing. But if he have not the potent alchemy that transmutes the lead of our commonplace associations into gold, as Shakespeare knows how to do so easily, yet his sense is always up to the sterling standard; and though he has not

[1] *Don Sebastian.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Cleomenes.*

added so much as some have done to the stock of bullion which others afterwards coin and put in circulation, there are few who have minted so many phrases that are still a part of our daily currency. The first line of the following passage has been worn pretty smooth, but the succeeding ones are less familiar: —

> "Men are but children of a larger growth,
> Our appetites as apt to change as theirs,
> And full as craving too and full as vain;
> And yet the soul, shut up in her dark room,
> Viewing so clear abroad, at home sees nothing;
> But, like a mole in earth, busy and blind,
> Works all her folly up and casts it outward
> In the world's open view."[1]

The image is mixed and even contradictory, but the thought obtains grace for it. I feel as if Shakespeare would have written *seeing* for *viewing*, thus gaining the strength of repetition in one verse and avoiding the sameness of it in the other. Dryden, I suspect, was not much given to correction, and indeed one of the great charms of his best writing is that everything seems struck off at a heat, as by a superior man in the best mood of his talk. Where he rises, he generally becomes fervent rather than imaginative; his thought does not incorporate itself in metaphor, as in purely poetic minds, but repeats and reinforces itself in simile. Where he *is* imaginative, it is in that lower sense which the poverty of our language, for want of a better word, compels us to call *picturesque*, and even then he shows little of that finer

[1] *All for Love.*

instinct which suggests so much more than it tells, and works the more powerfully as it taxes more the imagination of the reader. In Donne's "Relic" there is an example of what I mean. He fancies some one breaking up his grave and spying

> "A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,"—

a verse that still shines there in the darkness of the tomb, after two centuries, like one of those inextinguishable lamps whose secret is lost.[1] Yet Dryden sometimes showed a sense of this magic of a mysterious hint, as in the "Spanish Friar": —

> "No, I confess, you bade me not in words;
> The dial spoke not, but it made shrewd signs,
> And pointed full upon the stroke of murder."

This is perhaps a solitary example. Nor is he always so possessed by the image in his mind as unconsciously to choose even the picturesquely imaginative word. He has done so, however, in this passage from "Marriage à la Mode": —

> "You ne'er must hope again to see your princess,
> Except as prisoners view fair walks and streets,
> And careless passengers going by their grates."

But after all, he is best upon a level, table-land, it is true, and a very high level, but still somewhere between the loftier peaks of inspiration and the plain of every-day life. In those passages where

[1] Dryden, with his wonted perspicacity, follows Ben Jonson in calling Donne "the greatest wit, though not the best poet, of our nation." (Dedication of *Eleonora*.) Even as a poet Donne

> "Had in him those brave translunary things
> That our first poets had."

To open vistas for the imagination through the blind wall of the senses, as he could sometimes do, is the supreme function of poetry.

he moralizes he is always good, setting some obvious truth in a new light by vigorous phrase and happy illustration. Take this (from "Œdipus") as a proof of it: —

> "The gods are just,
> But how can finite measure infinite?
> Reason! alas, it does not know itself!
> Yet man, vain man, would with his short-lined plummet
> Fathom the vast abyss of heavenly justice.
> Whatever is, is in its causes just,
> Since all things are by fate. But purblind man
> Sees but a part o' th' chain, the nearest links,
> His eyes not carrying to that equal beam
> That poises all above."

From the same play I pick an illustration of that ripened sweetness of thought and language which marks the natural vein of Dryden. One cannot help applying the passage to the late Mr. Quincy:

> "Of no distemper, of no blast he died,
> But fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long,
> E'en wondered at because he dropt no sooner;
> Fate seemed to wind him up for fourscore years;
> Yet freshly ran he on ten winters more,
> Till, like a clock worn out with eating Time,
> The wheels of weary life at last stood still."[1]

Here is another of the same kind from "All for Love": —

> "Gone so soon!
> Is Death no more? He used him carelessly,
> With a familiar kindness: ere he knocked,
> Ran to the door and took him in his arms,
> As who should say, You 're welcome at all hours,
> A friend need give no warning."

[1] My own judgment is my sole warrant for attributing these extracts from *Œdipus* to Dryden rather than Lee.

With one more extract from the same play, which is in every way his best, for he had, when he wrote it, been feeding on the bee-bread of Shakespeare, I shall conclude. Antony says,

> "For I am now so sunk from what I was,
> Thou find'st me at my lowest water-mark.
> The rivers that ran in and raised my fortunes
> Are all dried up, or take another course:
> What I have left is from my native spring;
> I 've a heart still that swells in scorn of Fate,
> And lifts me to my banks."

This is certainly, from beginning to end, in what used to be called the *grand* style, at once noble and natural. I have not undertaken to analyze any one of the plays, for (except in "All for Love") it would have been only to expose their weakness. Dryden had *no* constructive faculty; and in every one of his longer poems that required a plot, the plot is bad, always more or less inconsistent with itself, and rather hitched-on to the subject than combining with it. It is fair to say, however, before leaving this part of Dryden's literary work, that Horne Tooke thought "Don Sebastian" "the best play extant."[1] Gray admired the plays of Dryden, "not as dramatic compositions, but as poetry."[2] "There are as many things finely said in his plays as almost by anybody," said Pope to Spence. Of their rant, their fustian, their bombast, their bad English, of their innumer-

[1] *Recollections of Rogers*, p. 165.

[2] Nicholls's *Reminiscences of Gray*. Pickering's edition of Gray's Works, vol. v. p. 35.

able sins against Dryden's own better conscience both as poet and critic, I shall excuse myself from giving any instances.[1] I like what is good in Dryden so much, and it *is* so good, that I think Gray was justified in always losing his temper when he heard "his faults criticised."[2]

It is as a satirist and pleader in verse that Dryden is best known, and as both he is in some respects unrivalled. His satire is not so sly as Chaucer's, but it is distinguished by the same good-nature. There is no malice in it. I shall not enter into his literary quarrels further than to say that he seems to me, on the whole, to have been forbearing, which is the more striking as he tells us repeatedly that he was naturally vindictive. It was he who called revenge "the darling attribute of heaven." "I complain not of their lampoons and libels, though I have been the public mark for many years. I am vindictive enough to have repelled force by force, if I could imagine that any of them had ever reached me." It was this feeling of easy superiority, I suspect, that made him the

[1] Let one suffice for all. In the *Royal Martyr*, Porphyrius, awaiting his execution, says to Maximin, who had wished him for a son-in-law: —

> "Where'er thou stand'st, I 'll level at that place
> My gushing blood, and spout it at thy face;
> Thus not by marriage we our blood will join;
> Nay, more, my arms shall throw my head at thine."

"It is no shame," says Dryden himself, "to be a poet, though it is to be a bad one." Cibber seems to say that the audience could not help laughing at Dryden's Rhodomontades as he calls them.

[2] Gray, *ubi supra*, p. 38.

mark for so much jealous vituperation. Scott is wrong in attributing his onslaught upon Settle to jealousy because one of the latter's plays had been performed at Court, — an honor never paid to any of Dryden's.[1] I have found nothing like a trace of jealousy in that large and benignant nature. In his vindication of the "Duke of Guise," he says, with honest confidence in himself: "Nay, I durst almost refer myself to some of the angry poets on the other side, whether I have not rather countenanced and assisted their beginnings than hindered them from rising." He seems to have been really as indifferent to the attacks on himself as Pope pretended to be. In the same vindication he says of the "Rehearsal," the only one of them that had any wit in it, and it has a great deal: "Much less am I concerned at the noble name of Bayes; that 's a brat so like his own father that he cannot be mistaken for any other body. They might as reasonably have called Tom Sternhold Virgil, and the resemblance would have held as well." In his Essay on Satire he says: "And yet we know that in Christian charity all offences are to be forgiven as we expect the like pardon for those we daily commit

[1] Scott had never seen Pepys's *Diary* when he wrote this, or he would have left it unwritten: "Fell to discourse of the last night's work at Court, where the ladies and Duke of Monmouth acted the *Indian Emperor* wherein they told me these things most remarkable that not any woman but the Duchess of Monmouth and Mrs. Cornwallis did anything but like fools and stocks, but that these two did do most extraordinary well; that not any man did anything well but Captain O'Bryan, who spoke and did well, but above all things did dance most incomparably." — 14th January, 1668.

against Almighty God. And this consideration has often made me tremble when I was saying our Lord's Prayer; for the plain condition of the forgiveness which we beg is the pardoning of others the offences which they have done to us; for which reason I have many times avoided the commission of that fault, even when I have been notoriously provoked."[1] And in another passage he says, with his usual wisdom: "Good sense and good-nature are never separated, though the ignorant world has thought otherwise. Good-nature, by which I mean beneficence and candor, is the product of right reason, which of necessity will give allowance to the failings of others, by considering that there is nothing perfect in mankind." In the same Essay he gives his own receipt for satire: "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! but how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! . . . This is the mystery of that noble trade. . . . Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery is offensive: a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. . . . There is a vast difference between the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, of a bare

[1] See also that noble passage in the *Hind and Panther* (1573–1591), where this is put into verse. Dryden always thought in prose.

hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my 'Absalom' is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough, and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. . . . I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides and little extravagances, to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious."

Dryden thought his genius led him that way. In his elegy on the satirist Oldham, whom Hallam, without reading him, I suspect, ranks next to Dryden,[1] he says: —

> "For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
> Cast in the same poetic mould with mine;
> One common note in either lyre did strike,
> And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike."

His practice is not always so delicate as his theory; but if he was sometimes rough, he never took a base advantage. He knocks his antagonist down, and there an end. Pope seems to have nursed his grudge, and then, watching his chance, to have squirted vitriol from behind a corner, rather glad than otherwise if it fell on the women of those he hated or envied. And if Dryden is never das-

[1] Probably on the authority of this very epitaph, as if epitaphs were to be believed even under oath! A great many authors live because we read nothing but their tombstones. Oldham was, to borrow one of Dryden's phrases, "a bad or, which is worse, an indifferent poet."

tardly, as Pope often was, so also he never wrote anything so maliciously depreciatory as Pope's unprovoked attack on Addison. Dryden's satire is often coarse, but where it is coarsest, it is commonly in defence of himself against attacks that were themselves brutal. Then, to be sure, he snatches the first ready cudgel, as in Shadwell's case, though even then there is something of the good-humor of conscious strength. Pope's provocation was too often the mere opportunity to say a biting thing, where he could do it safely. If his victim showed fight, he tried to smooth things over, as with Dennis and Hill. Dryden could forget that he had ever had a quarrel, but he never slunk away from any, least of all from one provoked by himself.[1] Pope's satire is too much occupied with the externals of manners, habits, personal defects, and peculiarities. Dryden goes right to the rooted character of the man, to the weaknesses of his nature, as where he says of Burnet: —

> "Prompt to assail, and careless of defence,
> Invulnerable in his impudence,
> He dares the world, and, eager of a name,
> He thrusts about and *justles into fame.*
> So fond of loud report that, not to miss
> Of being known (his last and utmost bliss),
> *He rather would be known for what he is.*"

It would be hard to find in Pope such compression of meaning as in the first, or such penetrative sarcasm as in the second of the passages I have under-

[1] "He was of a nature exceedingly humane and compassionate easily forgiving injuries, and capable of a prompt and sincere reconciliation with them that had offended him." — Congreve.

scored. Dryden's satire is still quoted for its comprehensiveness of application, Pope's rather for the elegance of its finish and the point of its phrase than for any deeper qualities.[1] I do not remember that Dryden ever makes poverty a reproach.[2] He was above it, alike by generosity of birth and mind. Pope is always the *parvenu*, always giving himself the airs of a fine gentleman, and, like Horace Walpole and Byron, affecting superiority to professional literature. Dryden, like Lessing, was a hack-writer, and was proud, as an honest man has a right to be, of being able to get his bread by his brains. He lived in Grub Street all his life, and never dreamed that where a man of genius lived was not the best quarter of the town. "Tell his Majesty," said sturdy old Jonson, "that his soul lives in an alley."

Dryden's prefaces are a mine of good writing and judicious criticism. His *obiter dicta* have often the penetration, and always more than the equity,

[1] Coleridge says excellently: "You will find this a good gauge or criterion of genius, — whether it progresses and evolves, or only spins upon itself. Take Dryden's Achitophel and Zimri; every line adds to or modifies the character, which is, as it were, a-building up to the very last verse; whereas in Pope's *Timon*, &c. the first two or three couplets contain all the pith of the character, and the twenty or thirty lines that follow are so much evidence or proof of overt acts of jealousy, or pride, or whatever it may be that is satirized." (*Table-Talk*, 192.) Some of Dryden's best satirical *hits* are let fall by seeming accident in his prose, as where he says of his Protestant assailants, "Most of them love all whores but her of Babylon." They had first attacked him on the score of his private morals.

[2] That he taxes Shadwell with it is only a seeming exception, as any careful reader will see.

of Voltaire's, for Dryden never loses temper, and never altogether qualifies his judgment by his self-love. "He was a more universal writer than Voltaire," said Horne Tooke, and perhaps it is true that he had a broader view, though his learning was neither so extensive nor so accurate. My space will not afford many extracts, but I cannot forbear one or two. He says of Chaucer, that "he is a perpetual fountain of good sense,"[1] and likes him better than Ovid, — a bold confession in that day. He prefers the pastorals of Theocritus to those of Virgil. "Virgil's shepherds are too well read in the philosophy of Epicurus and of Plato"; "there is a kind of rusticity in all those pompous verses, somewhat of a holiday shepherd strutting in his country buskins";[2] "Theocritus is softer than Ovid, he touches the passions more delicately, and performs all this out of his own fund, without diving into the arts and sciences for a supply. Even his Doric dialect has an incomparable sweetness in his clownishness, like a fair shepherdess, in her country russet, talking in a Yorkshire tone."[3] Comparing Virgil's verse with that of some other poets, he says, that his "numbers are perpetually varied to increase the delight of the reader, so that the same sounds are never repeated twice together. On the contrary, Ovid and Claudian, though they write in styles different from each other, yet have each of them but one sort of music in their verses.

[1] Preface to *Fables*.
[2] Dedication of the *Georgics*.
[3] Preface to *Second Miscellany*.

All the versification and little variety of Claudian is included within the compass of four or five lines, and then he begins again in the same tenor, perpetually closing his sense at the end of a verse, and that verse commonly which they call golden, or two substantives and two adjectives with a verb betwixt them to keep the peace. Ovid, with all his sweetness, has as little variety of numbers and sound as he; he is always, as it were, upon the hand-gallop, and his verse runs upon carpet-ground." [1] What a dreary half-century would have been saved to English poetry, could Pope have laid these sentences to heart, who, according to Spence, "learned versification wholly from Dryden's works"! Upon translation, no one has written so much and so well as Dryden in his various prefaces. Whatever has been said since is either expansion or variation of what he had said before. His general theory may be stated as an aim at something between the literalness of metaphrase and the looseness of paraphrase. "Where I have enlarged," he says, "I desire the false critics would not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but either *they are secretly in the poet*, or may be fairly deduced from him." Coleridge, with his usual cleverness of *assimilation*, has condensed him in a letter to Wordsworth: "There is no medium between a prose version and one on the avowed principle of *compensation* in the widest sense, i. e. manner, genius, total effect." [2]

[1] Preface to *Second Miscellany*.

[2] *Memoirs of Wordsworth*, vol. ii. p. 74 (American edition).

I have selected these passages, not because they are the best, but because they have a near application to Dryden himself. His own characterization of Chaucer (though too narrow for the greatest but one of English poets) is the best that could be given of himself: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." And the other passages show him a close and open-minded student of the art he professed. Has his influence on our literature, but especially on our poetry, been on the whole for good or evil? If he could have been read with the liberal understanding which he brought to the works of others, I should answer at once that it had been beneficial. But his translations and paraphrases, in some ways the best things he did, were done, like his plays, under contract to deliver a certain number of verses for a specified sum. The versification, of which he had learned the art by long practice, is excellent, but his haste has led him to fill out the measure of lines with phrases that add only to dilute, and thus the clearest, the most direct, the most manly versifier of his time became, without meaning it, the source (*fons et origo malorum*) of that poetic diction from which our poetry has not even yet recovered. I do not like to say it, but he has sometimes smothered the child-like simplicity of Chaucer under feather-beds of verbiage. What this kind of thing came to in the next century, when everybody ceremoniously took a bushel-basket to bring a wren's egg to market in, is only too sadly familiar. It is clear that his natural taste led Dryden to prefer directness and sim-

plicity of style. If he was too often tempted astray by Artifice, his love of Nature betrays itself in many an almost passionate outbreak of angry remorse. Addison tells us that he took particular delight in the reading of our old English ballads. What he valued above all things was Force, though in his haste he is willing to make a shift with its counterfeit, Effect. As usual, he had a good reason to urge for what he did: "I will not excuse, but justify myself for one pretended crime for which I am liable to be charged by false critics, not only in this translation, but in many of my original poems, — that I Latinize too much. It is true that when I find an English word significant and sounding, I neither borrow from the Latin or any other language; but when I want at home I must seek abroad. If sounding words are not of our growth and manufacture, who shall hinder me to import them from a foreign country? I carry not out the treasure of the nation which is never to return; but what I bring from Italy I spend in England: here it remains, and here it circulates; for if the coin be good, it will pass from one hand to another. I trade both with the living and the dead for the enrichment of our native language. We have enough in England to supply our necessity; but if we will have things of magnificence and splendor, we must get them by commerce. . . . Therefore, if I find a word in a classic author, I propose it to be naturalized by using it myself, and if the public approve of it the bill passes. But every man cannot distinguish betwixt pedantry and poetry; every

man, therefore, is not fit to innovate."[1] This is admirably said, and with Dryden's accustomed penetration to the root of the matter. The Latin has given us most of our canorous words, only they must not be confounded with merely sonorous ones, still less with phrases that, instead of supplementing the sense, encumber it. It was of Latinizing in this sense that Dryden was guilty. Instead of stabbing, he "with steel invades the life." The consequence was that by and by we have Dr. Johnson's poet, Savage, telling us, —

> "In front, a parlor meets my entering view,
> Opposed a room to sweet refection due";

Dr. Blacklock making a forlorn maiden say of her "dear," who is out late, —

> "Or by some apoplectic fit deprest
> Perhaps, alas! he seeks eternal rest";

and Mr. Bruce, in a Danish war-song, calling on the vikings to "assume their oars." But it must be admitted of Dryden that he seldom makes the second verse of a couplet the mere trainbearer to the first, as Pope was continually doing. In Dryden the rhyme waits upon the thought; in Pope and his school the thought curtsys to the tune for which it is written.

Dryden has also been blamed for his gallicisms.[2]

[1] *A Discourse of Epick Poetry.* "If the *public* approve." "On ne peut pas admettre dans le développement des langues aucune révolution artificielle et sciemment executée; il n'y a pour elles ni conciles, ni assemblées délibérantes; on ne les réforme pas comme une constitution vicieuse." — Renan, *De l'Origine du Langage*, p. 95.

[2] This is an old complaint. Puttenham sighs over such inno-

He tried some, it is true, but they have not been accepted. I do not think he added a single word to the language, unless, as I suspect, he first used *magnetism* in its present sense of moral attraction. What he did in his best writing was to use the English as if it were a spoken, and not merely an inkhorn language; as if it were his own to do what he pleased with it, as if it need not be ashamed of itself.[1] In this respect, his service to our prose was greater than any other man has ever rendered. He says he formed his style upon Tillotson's (Bossuet, on the other hand, formed *his* upon Corneille's); but I rather think he got it at Will's, for its great charm is that it has the various freedom of talk.[2] In verse, he had a pomp which, excellent in itself, became pompousness in his imitators. But he had nothing of Milton's ear for various rhythm and interwoven harmony. He knew how to give new

vation in Elizabeth's time, and Carew in James's. A language grows, and is not made. Almost all the new-fangled words with which Jonson in his *Poetaster* taxes Marston are now current.

[1] Like most idiomatic, as distinguished from correct writers, he knew very little about the language historically or critically. His prose and poetry swarm with locutions that would have made Lindley Murray's hair stand on end. *How* little he knew is plain from his criticising in Ben Jonson the use of *ones* in the plural, of "Though Heaven should speak with all *his* wrath," and *be* "as false English for *are*, though the rhyme hides it." Yet all are good English, and I have found them all in Dryden's own writing! Of his sins against idiom I have a longer list than I have room for. And yet he is one of our highest authorities for *real* English.

[2] To see what he rescued us from in pedantry on the one hand, and vulgarism on the other, read Feltham and Tom Brown — if you can.

modulation, sweetness, and force to the pentameter; but in what used to be called pindarics, I am heretic enough to think he generally failed. His so much praised "Alexander's Feast" (in parts of it, at least) has no excuse for its slovenly metre and awkward expression, but that it was written for music. He himself tells us, in the epistle dedicatory to "King Arthur," "that the numbers of poetry and vocal music are sometimes so contrary, that in many places I have been obliged to cramp my verses and make them rugged to the reader that they may be harmonious to the hearer." His renowned ode suffered from this constraint, but this is no apology for the vulgarity of conception in too many passages.[1]

Dryden's conversion to Romanism has been commonly taken for granted as insincere, and has therefore left an abiding stain on his character, though the other mud thrown at him by angry opponents or rivals brushed off so soon as it was dry. But I think his change of faith susceptible of several explanations, none of them in any way discreditable to him. Where Church and State are habitually

[1] "Cette ode mise en musique par Purcell (si je ne me trompe), passe en Angleterre pour le chef-d'œuvre de la poësie la plus sublime et la plus variée ; et je vous avoue que, comme je sais mieux l'anglais que le grec, j'aime cent fois mieux cette ode que tout Pindare." — Voltaire to M. de Chabanon, 9 mars, 1772.

Dryden would have agreed with Voltaire. When Chief-Justice Marlay, then a young Templar, 'congratulated him on having produced the finest and noblest Ode that had ever been written in any language, 'You are right, young gentleman' (replied Dryden), 'a nobler Ode never *was* produced, nor ever *will*.'" — Malone.

associated, it is natural that minds even of a high order should unconsciously come to regard religion as only a subtler mode of police.[1] Dryden, conservative by nature, had discovered before Joseph de Maistre, that Protestantism, so long as it justified its name by continuing to be an active principle, was the abettor of Republicanism, perhaps the vanguard of Anarchy. I think this is hinted in more than one passage in his preface to "The Hind and Panther." He may very well have preferred Romanism because of its elder claim to authority in all matters of doctrine, but I think he had a deeper reason in the constitution of his own mind. That he was "naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy," he tells us of himself in the preface to the "Religio Laici;" but he was a sceptic with an imaginative side, and in such characters scepticism and superstition play into each other's hands. This finds a curious illustration in a letter to his sons, written four years before his death: "Towards the latter end of this month, September, Charles will begin to recover his perfect health, according to his Nativity, which, casting it myself, I am sure is true, and all things hitherto have happened accordingly to the very time that I predicted them." Have we forgotten Montaigne's votive offerings at the shrine of Loreto?

Dryden was short of body, inclined to stoutness, and florid of complexion. He is said to have had "a sleepy eye," but was handsome and of a manly

[1] This was true of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and still more of Southey who in some respects was not unlike Dryden.

carriage. He "was not a very genteel man, he was intimate with none but poetical men.[1] He was said to be a very good man by all that knew him: he was as plump as Mr. Pitt, of a fresh color and a down look, and not very conversible." So Pope described him to Spence. He was friendly to rising merit, as to Congreve, for instance. Cibber says he was a poor reader. He still reigns in literary tradition, as when at Will's[2] his elbow-chair had the best place by the fire in winter, or on the balcony in summer, and when a pinch from his snuff-box made a young author blush with pleasure as would nowadays a favorable notice in the "Saturday Review." What gave and secures for him this singular eminence? To put it in a single word, I think that his qualities and faculties were in that rare combination which makes character. This gave *flavor* to whatever he wrote, — a very rare quality.

Was he, then, a great poet? Hardly, in the narrowest definition. But he was a strong thinker who sometimes carried common sense to a height where it catches the light of a diviner air, and

[1] Pope's notion of gentility was perhaps expressed in a letter from Lord Cobham to him: "I congratulate you upon the fine weather. 'T is a strange thing that people of condition and men of parts must enjoy it in common with the rest of the world." (Ruffhead's *Pope*, p. 276, note.) His Lordship's naïve distinction between people of condition and men of parts is as good as Pope's between genteel and poetical men. I fancy the poet grinning savagely as he read it.

[2] "This may confine their younger styles
Whom Dryden pedagogues at Will's."
Prior, *Epistle to Shephard* (1689).

warmed reason till it had wellnigh the illuminating property of intuition. Certainly he is not, like Spenser, the poets' poet, but other men have also their rights. Even the Philistine is a man and a brother, and is entirely right so far as he sees. To demand more of him is to be unreasonable. And he sees, among other things, that a man who undertakes to write should first have a meaning perfectly defined to himself, and then should be able to set it forth clearly in the best words. This is precisely Dryden's praise,[1] and amid the rickety sentiment looming big through misty phrase which marks so much of modern literature, to read him is as bracing as a northwest wind. He blows the mind clear. In mind and manner his foremost quality is energy. In ripeness of mind and bluff heartiness of expression, he takes rank with the best. His phrase is always a short-cut to his sense, for his estate was too spacious for him to need that trick of winding the path of his thought about, and planting it out with clumps of epithet, by which the landscape-gardeners of literature give to a paltry half-acre the air of a park. In poetry, to be next-best is, in one sense, to be nothing; and yet to be among the first in any kind of writing, as Dryden certainly was, is to be one of a very small company. He had, beyond most, the gift of the right word. And if he does not, like one or two of the greater masters of song, stir our sympathies by

[1] "Nothing is truly sublime," he himself said, "that is not just and proper." Sir Henry Wotton said of Sidney that "his wit was the very measure of congruity."

that indefinable aroma so magical in arousing the subtile associations of the soul, he has this in common with the few great writers, that the winged seeds of his thought embed themselves in the memory and germinate there. If I could be guilty of the absurdity of recommending to a young man any author on whom to form his style, I should tell him that, next to having something that will not stay unsaid, he could find no safer guide than Dryden.

Cowper, in a letter to Mr. Unwin (5th January, 1782), expresses what I think is the common feeling about Dryden, that, with all his defects, he had that indefinable something we call Genius. "But I admire Dryden most [he had been speaking of Pope], who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and a carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, and so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope with all his touching and retouching could never equal." But, after all, perhaps no man has summed him up so well as John Dennis, one of Pope's typical dunces, a dull man outside of his own sphere, as men are apt to be, but who had some sound notions as a critic, and thus became the object of Pope's fear and therefore of his resentment. Dennis speaks of him as his "departed friend, whom I infinitely esteemed when living for the solidity of his thought, for the spring and the warmth and the beautiful turn of it; for

[1] Dennis in a letter to Tonson, 1715.

the power and variety and fulness of his harmony; for the purity, the perspicuity, the energy of his expression; and, whenever these great qualities are required, for the pomp and solemnity and majesty of his style."[1] And yet there is something unhappily suggestive in what Congreve accidentally lets drop in describing his funeral where, he says, "We had an ode in Horace sung instead of David's Psalms." His burial, he tells us, "was the same with his life: variety and not of a piece; the quality and mob; farce and heroics; the sublime and ridicule mixt in a piece; great Cleopatra in a hackney coach." I know not how true this may be, but the last phrase better characterizes Dryden's poetry in four words than a page of disquisition could. But he knew how to "give his soul a loose," and ours too, as only the great know.

MY GARDEN ACQUAINTANCE

1869

ONE of the most delightful books in my father's library was White's "Natural History of Selborne." For me it has rather gained in charm with years. I used to read it without knowing the secret of the pleasure I found in it, but as I grow older I begin to detect some of the simple expedients of this natural magic. Open the book where you will, it takes you out of doors. In our broiling July weather one can walk out with this genially garrulous Fellow of Oriel and find refreshment instead of fatigue. You have no trouble in keeping abreast of him as he ambles along on his hobby-horse, now pointing to a pretty view, now stopping to watch the motions of a bird or an insect, or to bag a specimen for the Honourable Daines Barrington or Mr. Pennant. In simplicity of taste and natural refinement he reminds one of Walton; in tenderness toward what he would have called the brute creation, of Cowper. I do not know whether his descriptions of scenery are good or not, but they have made me familiar with his neighborhood. Since I first read him, I have walked over some of his favorite haunts, but I still see them through his eyes rather than by any recollection of actual and

personal vision. The book has also the delightfulness of absolute leisure. Mr. White seems never to have had any harder work to do than to study the habits of his feathered fellow-townsfolk, or to watch the ripening of his peaches on the wall. No doubt he looked after the souls of his parishioners with official and even friendly interest, but, I cannot help suspecting, with a less personal solicitude. For he seems to have lived before the Fall. His volumes are the journal of Adam in Paradise,

> "Annihilating all that 's made
> To a green thought in a green shade."

It is positive rest only to look into that garden of his. It is vastly better than to

> "See great Diocletian walk
> In the Salonian garden's noble shade,"

for thither ambassadors intrude to bring with them the noises of Rome, while here the world has no entrance. No rumor of the revolt of the American Colonies appears to have reached him. "The natural term of an hog's life" has more interest for him than that of an empire. Burgoyne may surrender and welcome; of what consequence is *that* compared with the fact that we can explain the odd tumbling of rooks in the air by their turning over "to scratch themselves with one claw"? All the couriers in Europe spurring rowel-deep make no stir in Mr. White's little Chartreuse; but the arrival of the house-martin a day earlier or later than last year is a piece of news worth sending express to all his correspondents.

Another secret charm of this book is its inad-

vertent humor, so much the more delicious because unsuspected by the author. How pleasant is his innocent vanity in adding to the list of the British, and still more of the Selbornian, *fauna!* I believe he would gladly have consented to be eaten by a tiger or a crocodile, if by that means the occasional presence within the parish limits of either of these anthropophagous brutes could have been established. He brags of no fine society, but is plainly a little elated by "having considerable acquaintance with a tame brown owl." Most of us have known our share of owls, but few can boast of intimacy with a feathered one. The great events of Mr. White's life, too, have that disproportionate importance which is always humorous. To think of his hands having actually been thought worthy (as neither Willoughby's nor Ray's were) to hold a stilted plover, the *Charadrius himantopus*, with no back toe, and therefore "liable, in speculation, to perpetual vacillations"! I wonder, by the way, if metaphysicians have no hind toes. In 1770 he makes the acquaintance in Sussex of "an old family tortoise," which had then been domesticated for thirty years. It is clear that he fell in love with it at first sight. We have no means of tracing the growth of his passion; but in 1780 we find him eloping with its object in a post-chaise. "The rattle and hurry of the journey so perfectly roused it that, when I turned it out in a border, it walked twice down to the bottom of my garden." It reads like a Court Journal: "Yesterday morning H. R. H. the Princess Alice took an airing of half an hour

on the terrace of Windsor Castle." This tortoise might have been a member of the Royal Society, if he could have condescended to so ignoble an ambition. It had but just been discovered that a surface inclined at a certain angle with the plane of the horizon took more of the sun's rays. The tortoise had always known this (though he unostentatiously made no parade of it), and used accordingly to tilt himself up against the garden-wall in the autumn. He seems to have been more of a philosopher than even Mr. White himself, caring for nothing but to get under a cabbage-leaf when it rained, or when the sun was too hot, and to bury himself alive before frost, — a four-footed Diogenes, who carried his tub on his back.

There are moods in which this kind of history is infinitely refreshing. These creatures whom we affect to look down upon as the drudges of instinct are members of a commonwealth whose constitution rests on immovable bases. Never any need of reconstruction there! *They* never dream of settling it by vote that eight hours are equal to ten, or that one creature is as clever as another and no more. *They* do not use their poor wits in regulating God's clocks, nor think they cannot go astray so long as they carry their guide-board about with them, — a delusion we often practise upon ourselves with our high and mighty reason, that admirable finger-post which points every way, as we choose to turn it, and always right. It is good for us now and then to converse with a world like Mr. White's, where Man is the least important of animals. But one

who, like me, has always lived in the country and always on the same spot, is drawn to his book by other occult sympathies. Do we not share his indignation at that stupid Martin who had graduated his thermometer no lower than 4° above zero of Fahrenheit, so that in the coldest weather ever known the mercury basely absconded into the bulb, and left us to see the victory slip through our fingers just as they were closing upon it? No man, I suspect, ever lived long in the country without being bitten by these meteorological ambitions. He likes to be hotter and colder, to have been more deeply snowed up, to have more trees, and larger, blown down than his neighbors. With us descendants of the Puritans especially, these weather-competitions supply the abnegated excitement of the race-course. Men learn to value thermometers of the true imaginative temperament, capable of prodigious elations and corresponding dejections. The other day (5th July) I marked 98° in the shade, my high-water mark, higher by one degree than I had ever seen it before. I happened to meet a neighbor; as we mopped our brows at each other, he told me that he had just cleared 100°, and I went home a beaten man. I had not felt the heat before, save as a beautiful exaggeration of sunshine; but now it oppressed me with the prosaic vulgarity of an oven. What had been poetic intensity became all at once rhetorical hyperbole. I might suspect his thermometer (as indeed I did, for we Harvard men are apt to think ill of any graduation save our own); but it was a poor con-

solation. The fact remained that his herald Mercury, standing a-tiptoe, could look down on mine. I seem to glimpse something of this familiar weakness in Mr. White. He, too, has shared in these mercurial triumphs and defeats. Nor do I doubt that he had a true country-gentleman's interest in the weathercock ; that his first question on coming down of a morning was, like Barabas's,

" Into what quarter peers my halcyon's bill ? "

It is an innocent and healthful employment of the mind, distracting one from too continual study of oneself, and leading one to dwell rather upon the indigestions of the elements than one's own. " Did the wind back round, or go about with the sun ? " is a rational question that bears not remotely on the making of hay and the prosperity of crops. I have little doubt that the regulated observation of the vane in many different places, and the interchange of results by telegraph, would put the weather, as it were, in our power, by betraying its ambushes before it is ready to give the assault.[1] At first sight, nothing seems more drolly trivial than the lives of those whose single achievement is to record the wind and the temperature three times a day. Yet such men are doubtless sent into the world for this special end, and perhaps there is no kind of accurate observation, whatever its object, that has not its final use and value for some one or other. It is even to be hoped that the speculations of our newspaper editors and their myriad correspon-

[1] This was written before we had a Weather Bureau.

dents upon the signs of the political atmosphere may also fill their appointed place in a well-regulated universe, if it be only that of supplying so many more jack-o'-lanterns to the future historian. Nay, the observations on finance of an M. C. whose sole knowledge of the subject has been derived from a lifelong success in getting a living out of the public without paying any equivalent therefor, will perhaps be of interest hereafter to some explorer of our *cloaca maxima*, whenever it is cleansed.

For many years I have been in the habit of noting down some of the leading events of my embowered solitude, such as the coming of certain birds and the like, — a kind of *mémoires pour servir*, after the fashion of White, rather than properly digested natural history. I think it not impossible that a few simple stories of my winged acquaintances might be found entertaining by persons of kindred taste.

There is a common notion that animals are better meteorologists than men, and I have little doubt that in immediate weather-wisdom they have the advantage of our sophisticated senses (though I suspect a sailor or shepherd would be their match), but I have seen nothing that leads me to believe their minds capable of erecting the horoscope of a whole season, and letting us know beforehand whether the winter will be severe or the summer rainless. Their foresight is provincial or even parochial,

> "By nature knew he ech ascensioun
> Of equinoxial in thilke toun."

I more than suspect that the Clerk of the Weather himself does not always know very long in advance whether he is to draw an order for hot or cold, dry or moist, and the musquash is scarce likely to be wiser. I have noted but two days' difference in the coming of the song-sparrow between a very early and a very backward spring. This very year I saw the linnets at work thatching, just before a snow-storm which covered the ground several inches deep for a number of days. They struck work and left us for a while, no doubt in search of food. Birds frequently perish from sudden changes in our whimsical spring weather of which they had no foreboding. More than thirty years ago, a cherry-tree, then in full bloom, near my window, was covered with humming-birds benumbed by a fall of mingled rain and snow, which probably killed many of them. It should seem that their coming was dated by the height of the sun, which betrays them into unthrifty matrimony;

> "So nature pricketh hem in their corages";

but their going is another matter. The chimney-swallows leave us early, for example, apparently so soon as their latest fledglings are firm enough of wing to attempt the long rowing-match that is before them. On the other hand, the wild-geese probably do not leave the North till they are frozen out, for I have heard their bugles sounding southward so late as the middle of December. What may be called local migrations are doubtless dictated by the chances of food. I have once been visited by large flights of cross-bills; and whenever the

snow lies long and deep on the ground, a flock of cedar-birds comes in midwinter to eat the berries on my hawthorns. I have never been quite able to fathom the local, or rather geographical partialities of birds. Never before this summer (1870) have the king-birds, handsomest of flycatchers, built in my orchard; though I always know where to find them within half a mile. The rose-breasted grosbeak has been a familiar bird in Brookline (three miles away), yet I never saw one here till last July, when I found a female busy among my raspberries and surprisingly bold. I hope she was *prospecting* with a view to settlement in our garden. She seemed, on the whole, to think well of my fruit, and I would gladly plant another bed if it would help to win over so delightful a neighbor.

The return of the robin is commonly announced by the newspapers, like that of eminent or notorious people to a watering-place, as the first authentic notification of spring. And such his appearance in the orchard and garden undoubtedly is. But, in spite of his name of migratory thrush, he stays with us all winter, and I have seen him when the thermometer marked 15 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit, armed impregnably within, like Emerson's Titmouse, and as cheerful as he. The robin has a bad reputation among people who do not value themselves less for being fond of cherries. There is, I admit, a spice of vulgarity in him, and his song is rather of the Bloomfield sort, too largely ballasted with prose. His ethics are of the Poor

Richard school, and the main chance which calls forth all his energy is altogether of the belly. He never has those fine intervals of lunacy into which his cousins, the catbird and the mavis, are apt to fall. But for a' that and twice as muckle 's a' that, I would not exchange him for all the cherries that ever came out of Asia Minor. With whatever faults, he has not wholly forfeited that superiority which belongs to the children of nature. He has a finer taste in fruit than could be distilled from many successive committees of the Horticultural Society, and he eats with a relishing gulp not inferior to Dr. Johnson's. He feels and freely exercises his right of eminent domain. His is the earliest mess of green peas ; his all the mulberries I had fancied mine. But if he get also the lion's share of the raspberries, he is a great planter, and sows those wild ones in the woods, that solace the pedestrian and give a momentary calm even to the jaded victims of the White Hills. He keeps a strict eye over one's fruit, and knows to a shade of purple when your grapes have cooked long enough in the sun. During the severe drought a few years ago, the robins wholly vanished from my garden. I neither saw nor heard one for three weeks. Meanwhile a small foreign grape-vine, rather shy of bearing, seemed to find the dusty air congenial, and, dreaming perhaps of its sweet Argos across the sea, decked itself with a score or so of fair bunches. I watched them from day to day till they should have secreted sugar enough from the sunbeams, and at last made up my mind that

I would celebrate my vintage the next morning. But the robins too had somehow kept note of them. They must have sent out spies, as did the Jews into the promised land, before I was stirring. When I went with my basket, at least a dozen of these winged vintagers bustled out from among the leaves, and alighting on the nearest trees interchanged some shrill remarks about me of a derogatory nature. They had fairly sacked the vine. Not Wellington's veterans made cleaner work of a Spanish town ; not Federals or Confederates were ever more impartial in the confiscation of neutral chickens. I was keeping my grapes a secret to surprise the fair Fidele with, but the robins made them a profounder secret to her than I had meant. The tattered remnant of a single bunch was all my harvest-home. How paltry it looked at the bottom of my basket, — as if a humming-bird had laid her egg in an eagle's nest ! I could not help laughing ; and the robins seemed to join heartily in the merriment. There was a native grape-vine close by, blue with its less refined abundance, but my cunning thieves preferred the foreign flavor. Could I tax them with want of taste ?

The robins are not good solo singers, but their chorus, as, like primitive fire-worshippers, they hail the return of light and warmth to the world, is unrivalled. There are a hundred singing like one. They are noisy enough then, and sing, as poets should, with no afterthought. But when they come after cherries to the tree near my window, they muffle their voices, and their faint *pip, pip, pop !*

sounds far away at the bottom of the garden, where they know I shall not suspect them of robbing the great black-walnut of its bitter-rinded store.[1] They are feathered Pecksniffs, to be sure, but then how brightly their breasts, that look rather shabby in the sunlight, shine in a rainy day against the dark green of the fringe-tree! After they have pinched and shaken all the life out of an earthworm, as Italian cooks pound all the spirit out of a steak, and then gulped him, they stand up in honest self-confidence, expand their red waistcoats with the virtuous air of a lobby member, and outface you with an eye that calmly challenges inquiry. "Do *I* look like a bird that knows the flavor of raw vermin? I throw myself upon a jury of my peers. Ask any robin if he ever ate anything less ascetic than the frugal berry of the juniper, and he will answer that his vow forbids him." Can such an open bosom cover such depravity? Alas, yes! I have no doubt his breast was redder at that very moment with the blood of my raspberries. On the whole, he is a doubtful friend in the garden. He makes his dessert of all kinds of berries, and is not averse from early pears. But when we remember how omnivorous he is, eating his own weight in an incredibly short time, and that Nature seems exhaustless in her invention of new insects hostile to vegetation, perhaps we may reckon that he does more good than harm. For my own part,

[1] The screech-owl, whose cry, despite his ill name, is one of the sweetest sounds in nature, softens his voice in the same way with the most beguiling mockery of distance.

I would rather have his cheerfulness and kind neighborhood than many berries.

For his cousin, the catbird, I have a still warmer regard. Always a good singer, he sometimes nearly equals the brown thrush, and has the merit of keeping up his music later in the evening than any bird of my familiar acquaintance. Ever since I can remember, a pair of them have built in a gigantic syringa, near our front door, and I have known the male to sing almost uninterruptedly during the evenings of early summer till twilight duskened into dark. They differ greatly in vocal talent, but all have a delightful way of crooning over, and, as it were, rehearsing their song in an undertone, which makes their nearness always unobtrusive. Though there is the most trustworthy witness to the imitative propensity of this bird, I have only once, during an intimacy of more than forty years, heard him indulge it. In that case, the imitation was by no means so close as to deceive, but a free reproduction of the notes of some other birds, especially of the oriole, as a kind of variation in his own song. The catbird is as shy as the robin is vulgarly familiar. Only when his nest or his fledglings are approached does he become noisy and almost aggressive. I have known him to station his young in a thick cornel-bush on the edge of the raspberry-bed, after the fruit began to ripen, and feed them there for a week or more. In such cases he shows none of that conscious guilt which makes the robin contemptible. On the contrary, he will maintain his post in the

thicket, and sharply scold the intruder who ventures to steal *his* berries. After all, his claim is only for tithes, while the robin will bag your entire crop if he get a chance.

Dr. Watts's statement that "birds in their little nests agree," like too many others intended to form the infant mind, is very far from being true. On the contrary, the most peaceful relation of the different species to each other is that of armed neutrality. They are very jealous of neighbors. A few years ago, I was much interested in the house-building of a pair of summer yellow-birds. They had chosen a very pretty site near the top of a tall white lilac, within easy eye-shot of a chamber window. A very pleasant thing it was to see their little home growing with mutual help, to watch their industrious skill interrupted only by little flirts and snatches of endearment, frugally cut short by the common-sense of the tiny housewife. They had brought their work nearly to an end, and had already begun to line it with fern-down, the gathering of which demanded more distant journeys and longer absences. But, alas! the syringa, immemorial manor of the catbirds, was not more than twenty feet away, and these "giddy neighbors" had, as it appeared, been all along jealously watchful, though silent, witnesses of what they deemed an intrusion of squatters. No sooner were the pretty mates fairly gone for a new load of lining, than

> "To their unguarded nest these weasel Scots
> Came stealing."

Silently they flew back and forth, each giving a

vengeful dab at the nest in passing. They did not fall-to and deliberately destroy it, for they might have been caught at their mischief. As it was, whenever the yellow-birds came back, their enemies were hidden in their own sight-proof bush. Several times their unconscious victims repaired damages, but at length, after counsel taken together, they gave it up. Perhaps, like other unlettered folk, they came to the conclusion that the Devil was in it, and yielded to the invisible persecutions of witchcraft.

The robins, by constant attacks and annoyances, have succeeded in driving off the blue-jays who used to build in our pines, their gay colors and quaint noisy ways making them welcome and amusing neighbors. I once had the chance of doing a kindness to a household of them, which they received with very friendly condescension. I had had my eye for some time upon a nest, and was puzzled by a constant fluttering of what seemed full-grown wings in it whenever I drew nigh. At last I climbed the tree, in spite of angry protests from the old birds against my intrusion. The mystery had a very simple solution. In building the nest, a long piece of packthread had been somewhat loosely woven in. Three of the young had contrived to entangle themselves in it, and had become full-grown without being able to launch themselves upon the air. One was unharmed; another had so tightly twisted the cord about its shank that one foot was curled up and seemed paralyzed; the third, in its struggles to

escape, had sawn through the flesh of the thigh and so much harmed itself that I thought it humane to put an end to its misery. When I took out my knife to cut their hempen bonds, the heads of the family seemed to divine my friendly intent. Suddenly ceasing their cries and threats, they perched quietly within reach of my hand, and watched me in my work of manumission. This, owing to the fluttering terror of the prisoners, was an affair of some delicacy; but erelong I was rewarded by seeing one of them fly away to a neighboring tree, while the cripple, making a parachute of his wings, came lightly to the ground, and hopped off as well as he could with one leg, obsequiously waited on by his elders. A week later I had the satisfaction of meeting him in the pine-walk, in good spirits, and already so far recovered as to be able to balance himself with the lame foot. I have no doubt that in his old age he accounted for his lameness by some handsome story of a wound received at the famous Battle of the Pines, when our tribe, overcome by numbers, was driven from its ancient camping-ground. Of late years the jays have visited us only at intervals; and in winter their bright plumage, set off by the snow, and their cheerful cry, are especially welcome. They would have furnished Æsop with a fable, for the feathered crest in which they seem to take so much satisfaction is often their fatal snare. Country boys make a hole with their finger in the snow-crust just large enough to admit the jay's head, and, hollowing it out somewhat beneath, bait it

with a few kernels of corn. The crest slips easily into the trap, but refuses to be pulled out again, and he who came to feast remains a prey.

Twice have the crow-blackbirds attempted a settlement in my pines, and twice have the robins, who claim a right of preëmption, so successfully played the part of border-ruffians as to drive them away, — to my great regret, for they are the best substitute we have for rooks. At Shady Hill (now, alas! empty of its so long-loved household) they build by hundreds, and nothing can be more cheery than their creaking clatter (like a convention of old-fashioned tavern-signs) as they gather at evening to debate in mass meeting their windy politics, or to gossip at their tent-doors over the events of the day. Their port is grave, and their stalk across the turf as martial as that of a second-rate ghost in Hamlet. They never meddled with my corn, so far as I could discover.

For a few years I had crows, but their nests are an irresistible bait for boys, and their settlement was broken up. They grew so wonted as to throw off a great part of their shyness, and to tolerate my near approach. One very hot day I stood for some time within twenty feet of a mother and three children, who sat on an elm bough over my head, gasping in the sultry air, and holding their wings half-spread for coolness. All birds during the pairing season become more or less sentimental, and murmur soft nothings in a tone very unlike the grinding-organ repetition and loudness of their habitual song. The crow is very comical as a

lover, and to hear him trying to soften his croak to the proper Saint Preux standard, has something the effect of a Mississippi boatman quoting Tennyson. Yet there are few things to my ear more melodious than his caw of a clear winter morning as it drops to you filtered through five hundred fathoms of crisp blue air. The hostility of all smaller birds makes the moral character of the crow, for all his deaconlike demeanor and garb, somewhat questionable. He could never sally forth without insult. The golden robins, especially, would chase him as far as I could follow with my eye, making him duck clumsily to avoid their importunate bills. I do not believe, however, that he robbed any nests hereabouts, for the refuse of the gas-works, which, in our free-and-easy community, is allowed to poison the river, supplied him with dead alewives in abundance. I used to watch him making his periodical visits to the salt-marshes and coming back with a fish in his beak to his young savages, who, no doubt, like it in that condition which makes it savory to the Kanakas and other corvine races of men.

Orioles are in great plenty with me. I have seen seven males flashing about the garden at once. A merry crew of them swing their hammocks from the pendulous boughs. During one of these latter years, when the canker-worms stripped our elms as bare as winter, these birds went to the trouble of rebuilding their unroofed nests, and chose for the purpose trees which are safe from those swarming vandals, such as the ash and the button-wood.

One year a pair (disturbed, I suppose, elsewhere) built a second nest in an elm, within a few yards of the house. My friend, Edward E. Hale, told me once that the oriole rejected from his web all strands of brilliant color, and I thought it a striking example of that instinct of concealment noticeable in many birds, though it should seem in this instance that the nest was amply protected by its position from all marauders but owls and squirrels. Last year, however, I had the fullest proof that Mr. Hale was mistaken. A pair of orioles built on the lowest trailer of a weeping elm, which hung within ten feet of our drawing-room window, and so low that I could reach it from the ground. The nest was wholly woven and felted with ravellings of woollen carpet in which scarlet predominated. Would the same thing have happened in the woods? Or did the nearness of a human dwelling perhaps give the birds a greater feeling of security? They are very bold, by the way, in quest of cordage, and I have often watched them stripping the fibrous bark from a honeysuckle growing over the very door. But, indeed, all my birds look upon me as if I were a mere tenant at will, and they were landlords. With shame I confess it, I have been bullied even by a hummingbird. This spring, as I was cleansing a pear-tree of its lichens, one of these little zigzagging blurs came purring toward me, couching his long bill like a lance, his throat sparkling with angry fire, to warn me off from a Missouri-currant whose honey he was sipping. And many a time he has

driven me out of a flower-bed. This summer, by the way, a pair of these winged emeralds fastened their mossy acorn-cup upon a bough of the same elm which the orioles had enlivened the year before. We watched all their proceedings from the window through an opera-glass, and saw their two nestlings grow from black needles with a tuft of down at the lower end, till they whirled away on their first short experimental flights. They became strong of wing in a surprisingly short time, and I never saw them or the male bird after, though the female was regular as usual in her visits to our petunias and verbenas. I do not think it ground enough for a generalization, but in the many times when I watched the old birds feeding their young, the mother always alighted, while the father as uniformly remained upon the wing.

The bobolinks are generally chance visitors, tinkling through the garden in blossoming-time, but this year, owing to the long rains early in the season, their favorite meadows were flooded, and they were driven to the upland. So I had a pair of them domiciled in my grass-field. The male used to perch in an apple-tree, then in full bloom, and, while I stood perfectly still close by, he would circle away, quivering round the entire field of five acres, with no break in his song, and settle down again among the blossoms, to be hurried away almost immediately by a new rapture of music. He had the volubility of an Italian charlatan at a fair, and, like him, appeared to be proclaiming the mer-

its of some quack remedy. *Opodeldoc-opodeldoc-try-Doctor-Lincoln's-opodeldoc!* he seemed to repeat over and over again, with a rapidity that would have distanced the deftest-tongued Figaro that ever rattled. I remember Count Gurowski saying once, with that easy superiority of knowledge about this country which is the monopoly of foreigners, that we had no singing-birds! Well, well, Mr. Hepworth Dixon has found the typical America in Oneida and Salt Lake City. Of course, an intelligent European is the best judge of these matters. The truth is there are more singing-birds in Europe because there are fewer forests. These songsters love the neighborhood of man because hawks and owls are rarer, while their own food is more abundant. Most people seem to think, the more trees, the more birds. Even Châteaubriand, who first tried the primitive-forest-cure, and whose description of the wilderness in its imaginative effects is unmatched, fancies the "people of the air singing their hymns to him." So far as my own observation goes, the farther one penetrates the sombre solitudes of the woods, the more seldom does one hear the voice of any singing-bird. In spite of Châteaubriand's minuteness of detail, in spite of that marvellous reverberation of the decrepit tree falling of its own weight, which he was the first to notice, I cannot help doubting whether he made his way very deep into the wilderness. At any rate, in a letter to Fontanes, written in 1804, he speaks of *mes chevaux paissants à quelque distance.* To be sure Châteaubri-

and was apt to mount the high horse, and this may have been but an afterthought of the *grand seigneur*, but certainly one would not make much headway on horseback toward the druid fastnesses of the primeval pine.

The bobolinks build in considerable numbers in a meadow within a quarter of a mile of us. A houseless lane passes through the midst of their camp, and in clear westerly weather, at the right season, one may hear a score of them singing at once. When they are breeding, if I chance to pass, one of the male birds always accompanies me like a constable, flitting from post to post of the rail-fence, with a short note of reproof continually repeated, till I am fairly out of the neighborhood. Then he will swing away into the air and run down the wind, gurgling music without stint over the unheeding tussocks of meadow-grass and dark clumps of bulrushes that mark his domain.

We have no bird whose song will match the nightingale's in compass, none whose note is so rich as that of the European blackbird; but for mere rapture I have never heard the bobolink's rival. Yet his opera-season is a short one. The ground and tree sparrows are our most constant performers. It is now late in August, and one of the latter sings every day and all day long in the garden. Till within a fortnight, a pair of indigo-birds would keep up their lively *duo* for an hour together. While I write, I hear an oriole gay as in June, and the plaintive *may-be* of the goldfinch tells me he is stealing my lettuce-seeds. I know

not what the experience of others may have been, but the only bird I have ever heard sing in the night has been the chip-bird. I should say he sang about as often during the darkness as cocks crow. One can hardly help fancying that he sings in his dreams.

> "Father of light, what sunnie seed,
> What glance of day hast thou confined
> Into this bird? To all the breed
> This busie ray thou hast assigned;
> Their magnetism works all night
> And dreams of Paradise and light."

On second thought, I remember to have heard the cuckoo strike the hours nearly all night with the regularity of a Swiss clock.

The dead limbs of our elms, which I spare to that end, bring us the flicker every summer, and almost daily I hear his wild scream and laugh close at hand, himself invisible. He is a shy bird, but a few days ago I had the satisfaction of studying him through the blinds as he sat on a tree within a few feet of me. Seen so near and at rest, he makes good his claim to the title of pigeon-woodpecker. Lumberers have a notion that he is harmful to timber, digging little holes through the bark to encourage the settlement of insects. The regular rings of such perforations which one may see in almost any apple-orchard seem to give some probability to this theory. Almost every season a solitary quail visits us, and, unseen among the currant-bushes, calls *Bob White*, *Bob White*, as if he were playing at hide-and-seek with that imaginary being. A rarer visitant is the turtle-dove,

whose pleasant coo (something like the muffled crow of a cock from a coop covered with snow) I have sometimes heard, and whom I once had the good luck to see close by me in the mulberry-tree. The wild-pigeon, once numerous, I have not seen for many years.[1] Of savage birds, a hen-hawk now and then quarters himself upon us for a few days, sitting sluggish in a tree after a surfeit of poultry. One of them once offered me a near shot from my study-window one drizzly day for several hours. But it was Sunday, and I gave him the benefit of its gracious truce of God.

Certain birds have disappeared from our neighborhood within my memory. I remember when the whippoorwill could be heard in Sweet Auburn. The night-hawk, once common, is now rare. The brown thrush has moved farther up country. For years I have not seen or heard any of the larger owls, whose hooting was one of my boyish terrors. The cliff-swallow, strange emigrant, that eastward takes his way, has come and gone again in my time. The bank-swallows, wellnigh innumerable during my boyhood, no longer frequent the crumbly cliff of the gravel-pit by the river. The barn-swallows, which once swarmed in our barn, flashing through the dusty sunstreaks of the mow, have been gone these many years. My father would lead me out to see them gather on the roof, and take counsel before their yearly migration, as Mr. White used to see them at Selborne. *Eheu, fugaces!* Thank fortune, the swift still glues his nest, and

[1] They made their appearance again this summer (1870).

rolls his distant thunders night and day in the wide-throated chimneys, still sprinkles the evening air with his merry twittering. The populous heronry in Fresh Pond meadows has been wellnigh broken up, but still a pair or two haunt the old home, as the gypsies of Ellangowan their ruined huts, and every evening fly over us riverwards, clearing their throats with a hoarse hawk as they go, and, in cloudy weather, scarce higher than the tops of the chimneys. Sometimes I have known one to alight in one of our trees, though for what purpose I never could divine. Since this was written, they began in greater numbers to spend the day in a group of pines just within my borders. Once, when my exploring footstep startled them, I counted fifty flashing in circles over my head. By watchful protection I induced two pairs of them to build, and, as if sensible of my friendship, they made their nests in a pine within a hundred feet of the house. They shine for ever in Longfellow's verse. Kingfishers have sometimes puzzled me in the same way, perched at high noon in a pine, springing their watchman's rattle when they flitted away from my curiosity, and seeming to shove their top-heavy heads along as a man does a wheelbarrow.

Some birds have left us, I suppose, because the country is growing less wild. I once found a summer duck's nest within quarter of a mile of our house, but such a *trouvaille* would be impossible now as Kidd's treasure. And yet the mere taming of the neighborhood does not quite satisfy me as an

explanation. Twenty years ago, on my way to bathe in the river, I saw every day a brace of woodcock, on the miry edge of a spring within a few rods of a house, and constantly visited by thirsty cows. There was no growth of any kind to conceal them, and yet these ordinarily shy birds were almost as indifferent to my passing as common poultry would have been. Since bird-nesting has become scientific, and dignified itself as oölogy, that, no doubt, is partly to blame for some of our losses. But some old friends are constant. Wilson's thrush comes every year to remind me of that most poetic of ornithologists. He flits before me through the pine-walk like the very genius of solitude. A pair of pewees have built immemorially on a jutting brick in the arched entrance to the ice-house. Always on the same brick, and never more than a single pair, though two broods of five each are raised there every summer. How do they settle their claim to the homestead? By what right of primogeniture? Once the children of a man employed about the place *oölogized* the nest, and the pewees left us for a year or two. I felt towards those boys as the messmates of the Ancient Mariner did towards him after he had shot the albatross. But the pewees came back at last, and one of them is now on his wonted perch, so near my window that I can hear the click of his bill as he snaps a fly on the wing with the unerring precision a stately Trasteverina shows in the capture of her smaller deer. The pewee is the first bird to pipe up in the morning; and, during the early summer he preludes his

matutinal ejaculation of *pewee* with a slender whistle, unheard at any other time. He saddens with the season, and, as summer declines, he changes his note to *eheu, pewee!* as if in lamentation. Had he been an Italian bird, Ovid would have had a plaintive tale to tell about him. He is so familiar as often to pursue a fly through the open window into my library.

There is something inexpressibly dear to me in these old friendships of a lifetime. There is scarce a tree of mine but has had, at some time or other, a happy homestead among its boughs, and to which I cannot say,

> "Many light hearts and wings,
> Which now be dead, lodged in thy living bowers."

My walk under the pines would lose half its summer charm were I to miss that shy anchorite, the Wilson's thrush, nor hear in haying-time the metallic ring of his song, that justifies his rustic name of *scythe-whet*. I protect my game as jealously as an English squire. If anybody had oölogized a certain cuckoo's nest I know of (I have a pair in my garden every year), it would have left me a sore place in my mind for weeks. I love to bring these aborigines back to the mansuetude they showed to the early voyagers, and before (forgive the involuntary pun) they had grown accustomed to man and knew his savage ways. And they repay your kindness with a sweet familiarity too delicate ever to breed contempt. I have made a Penn-treaty with them, preferring that to the Puritan way with the natives, which converted them to a

little Hebraism and a great deal of Medford rum. If they will not come near enough to me (as most of them will), I bring them close with an opera-glass, — a much better weapon than a gun. I would not, if I could, convert them from their pretty pagan ways. The only one I sometimes have savage doubts about is the red squirrel. I *think* he oölogizes. I *know* he eats cherries (we counted five of them at one time in a single tree, the stones pattering down like the sparse hail that preludes a storm), and that he gnaws off the small end of pears to get at the seeds. He steals the corn from under the noses of my poultry. But what would you have? He will come down upon a limb of the tree I am lying under till he is within a yard of me. He and his mate will scurry up and down the great black-walnut for my diversion, chattering like monkeys. Can I sign his death-warrant who has tolerated me about his grounds so long? Not I. Let them steal, and welcome. I am sure I should, had I had the same bringing up and the same temptation. As for the birds, I do not believe there is one of them but does more good than harm; and of how many featherless bipeds can this be said?

ON A CERTAIN CONDESCENSION IN FOREIGNERS

1869

WALKING one day toward the Village, as we used to call it in the good old days, when almost every dweller in the town had been born in it, I was enjoying that delicious sense of disenthralment from the actual which the deepening twilight brings with it, giving as it does a sort of obscure novelty to things familiar. The coolness, the hush, broken only by the distant bleat of some belated goat, querulous to be disburthened of her milky load, the few faint stars, more guessed as yet than seen, the sense that the coming dark would so soon fold me in the secure privacy of its disguise, — all things combined in a result as near absolute peace as can be hoped for by a man who knows that there is a writ out against him in the hands of the printer's devil. For the moment, I was enjoying the blessed privilege of thinking without being called on to stand and deliver what I thought to the small public who are good enough to take any interest therein. I love old ways, and the path I was walking felt kindly to the feet it had known for almost fifty years. How many fleeting impressions it had shared with me! How many times I had lingered

to study the shadows of the leaves mezzotinted upon the turf that edged it by the moon, of the bare boughs etched with a touch beyond Rembrandt by the same unconscious artist on the smooth page of snow! If I turned round, through dusky tree-gaps came the first twinkle of evening lamps in the dear old homestead. On Corey's hill I could see these tiny pharoses of love and home and sweet domestic thoughts flash out one by one across the blackening salt-meadow between. How much has not kerosene added to the cheerfulness of our evening landscape! A pair of night-herons flapped heavily over me toward the hidden river. The war was ended. I might walk townward without that aching dread of bulletins that had darkened the July sunshine and twice made the scarlet leaves of October seem stained with blood. I remembered with a pang, half-proud, half-painful, how, so many years ago, I had walked over the same path and felt round my finger the soft pressure of a little hand that was one day to harden with faithful grip of sabre. On how many paths, leading to how many homes where proud Memory does all she can to fill up the fireside gaps with shining shapes, must not men be walking in just such pensive mood as I? Ah, young heroes, safe in immortal youth as those of Homer, you at least carried your ideal hence untarnished! It is locked for you beyond moth or rust in the treasure-chamber of Death.

Is not a country, I thought, that has had such as they in it, that could give such as they a brave joy in dying for it, worth something, then? And as I

felt more and more the soothing magic of evening's cool palm upon my temples, as my fancy came home from its revery, and my senses, with reawakened curiosity, ran to the front windows again from the viewless closet of abstraction, and felt a strange charm in finding the old tree and shabby fence still there under the travesty of falling night, nay, were conscious of an unsuspected newness in familiar stars and the fading outlines of hills my earliest horizon, I was conscious of an immortal soul, and could not but rejoice in the unwaning goodliness of the world into which I had been born without any merit of my own. I thought of dear Henry Vaughan's rainbow, "Still young and fine!" I remembered people who had to go over to the Alps to learn what the divine silence of snow was, who must run to Italy before they were conscious of the miracle wrought every day under their very noses by the sunset, who must call upon the Berkshire hills to teach them what a painter autumn was, while close at hand the Fresh Pond meadows made all oriels cheap with hues that showed as if a sunset-cloud had been wrecked among their maples. One might be worse off than even in America, I thought. There are some things so elastic that even the heavy roller of democracy cannot flatten them altogether down. The mind can weave itself warmly in the cocoon of its own thoughts and dwell a hermit anywhere. A country without traditions, without ennobling associations, a scramble of *parvenus*, with a horrible consciousness of shoddy running through politics, manners, art, literature, nay,

religion itself? I confess, it did not seem so to me there in that illimitable quiet, that serene self-possession of nature, where Collins might have brooded his "Ode to Evening," or where those verses on Solitude in Dodsley's Collection, that Hawthorne liked so much, might have been composed. Traditions? Granting that we had none, all that is worth having in them is the common property of the soul, — an estate in gavelkind for all the sons of Adam, — and, moreover, if a man cannot stand on his two feet (the prime quality of whoever has left any tradition behind him), were it not better for him to be honest about it at once, and go down on all fours? And for associations, if one have not the wit to make them for himself out of native earth, no ready-made ones of other men will avail much. Lexington is none the worse to me for not being in Greece, nor Gettysburg that its name is not Marathon. "Blessed old fields," I was just exclaiming to myself, like one of Mrs. Radcliffe's heroes, "dear acres, innocently secure from history, which these eyes first beheld, may you be also those to which they shall at last slowly darken!" when I was interrupted by a voice which asked me in German whether I was the Herr Professor, Doctor, So-and-so? The "Doctor" was by brevet or vaticination, to make the grade easier to my pocket.

One feels so intimately assured that one is made up, in part, of shreds and leavings of the past, in part of the interpolations of other people, that an honest man would be slow in saying *yes* to such a question. But "my name is So-and-so" is a safe

answer, and I gave it. While I had been romancing with myself, the street-lamps had been lighted, and it was under one of these detectives that have robbed the Old Road of its privilege of sanctuary after nightfall that I was ambushed by my foe. The inexorable villain had taken my description, it appears, that I might have the less chance to escape him. Dr. Holmes tells us that we change our substance, not every seven years, as was once believed, but with every breath we draw. Why had I not the wit to avail myself of the subterfuge, and, like Peter, to renounce my identity, especially, as in certain moods of mind, I have often more than doubted of it myself? When a man is, as it were, his own front-door, and is thus knocked at, why may he not assume the right of that sacred wood to make every house a castle, by denying himself to all visitations? I was truly not at home when the question was put to me, but had to recall myself from all out-of-doors, and to piece my self-consciousness hastily together as well as I could before I answered it.

I knew perfectly well what was coming. It is seldom that debtors or good Samaritans waylay people under gas-lamps in order to force money upon them, so far as I have seen or heard. I was also aware, from considerable experience, that every foreigner is persuaded that, by doing this country the favor of coming to it, he has laid every native thereof under an obligation, pecuniary or other, as the case may be, whose discharge he is entitled to on demand duly made in person or by letter. Too

much learning (of this kind) had made me mad in the provincial sense of the word. I had begun life with the theory of giving something to every beggar that came along, though sure of never finding a native-born countryman among them. In a small way, I was resolved to emulate Hatem Tai's tent, with its three hundred and sixty-five entrances, one for every day in the year, — I know not whether he was astronomer enough to add another for leap-years. The beggars were a kind of German-silver aristocracy; not real plate, to be sure, but better than nothing. Where everybody was overworked, they supplied the comfortable equipoise of absolute leisure, so æsthetically needful. Besides, I was but too conscious of a vagrant fibre in myself, which too often thrilled me in my solitary walks with the temptation to wander on into infinite space, and by a single spasm of resolution to emancipate myself from the drudgery of prosaic serfdom to respectability and the regular course of things. This prompting has been at times my familiar demon, and I could not but feel a kind of respectful sympathy for men who had dared what I had only sketched out to myself as a splendid possibility. For seven years I helped maintain one heroic man on an imaginary journey to Portland, — as fine an example as I have ever known of hopeless loyalty to an ideal. I assisted another so long in a fruitless attempt to reach Mecklenburg-Schwerin, that at last we grinned in each other's faces when we met, like a couple of augurs. He was possessed by this harmless mania as some are by the North Pole,

and I shall never forget his look of regretful compassion (as for one who was sacrificing his higher life to the fleshpots of Egypt) when I at last advised him somewhat strenuously to go to the D——, whither the road was so much travelled that he could not miss it. General Banks, in his noble zeal for the honor of his country, would confer on the Secretary of State the power of imprisoning, in case of war, all these seekers of the unattainable, thus by a stroke of the pen annihilating the single poetic element in our humdrum life. Alas! not everybody has the genius to be a Bobbin-Boy, or doubtless all these also would have chosen that more prosperous line of life! But moralists, sociologists, political economists, and taxes have slowly convinced me that my beggarly sympathies were a sin against society. Especially was the Buckle doctrine of averages (so flattering to our free-will) persuasive with me; for as there must be in every year a certain number who would bestow an alms on these abridged editions of the Wandering Jew, the withdrawal of my quota could make no possible difference, since some destined proxy must always step forward to fill my gap. Just so many misdirected letters every year and no more! Would it were as easy to reckon up the number of men on whose backs fate has written the wrong address, so that they arrive by mistake in Congress and other places where they do not belong! May not these wanderers of whom I speak have been sent into the world without any proper address at all? Where is our Dead-Letter Office for such? And if wiser

social arrangements should furnish us with something of the sort, fancy (horrible thought!) how many a workingman's friend (a kind of industry in which the labor is light and the wages heavy) would be sent thither because not called for in the office where he at present lies!

But I am leaving my new acquaintance too long under the lamp-post. The same Gano which had betrayed me to him revealed to me a well-set young man of about half my own age, as well dressed, so far as I could see, as I was, and with every natural qualification for getting his own livelihood as good, if not better, than my own. He had been reduced to the painful necessity of calling upon me by a series of crosses beginning with the Baden Revolution (for which, I own, he seemed rather young, — but perhaps he referred to a kind of revolution practised every season at Baden-Baden), continued by repeated failures in business, for amounts which must convince me of his entire respectability, and ending with our Civil War. During the latter, he had served with distinction as a soldier, taking a main part in every important battle, with a rapid list of which he favored me, and no doubt would have admitted that, impartial as Jonathan Wild's great ancestor, he had been on both sides, had I baited him with a few hints of conservative opinions on a subject so distressing to a gentleman wishing to profit by one's sympathy and unhappily doubtful as to which way it might lean. For all these reasons, and, as he seemed to imply, for his merit in consenting to be born in Germany,

he considered himself my natural creditor to the extent of five dollars, which he would handsomely consent to accept in greenbacks, though he preferred specie. The offer was certainly a generous one, and the claim presented with an assurance that carried conviction. But, unhappily, I had been led to remark a curious natural phenomenon. If I was ever weak enough to give anything to a petitioner of whatever nationality, it always rained decayed compatriots of his for a month after. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* may not always be safe logic, but here I seemed to perceive a natural connection of cause and effect. Now, a few days before I had been so tickled with a paper (professedly written by a benevolent American clergyman) certifying that the bearer, a hard-working German, had long "sofered with rheumatic paints in his limps," that, after copying the passage into my note-book, I thought it but fair to pay a trifling *honorarium* to the author. I had pulled the string of the shower-bath! It had been running shipwrecked sailors for some time, but forthwith it began to pour Teutons, redolent of *lager-bier*. I could not help associating the apparition of my new friend with this series of otherwise unaccountable phenomena. I accordingly made up my mind to deny the debt, and modestly did so, pleading a native bias towards impecuniosity to the full as strong as his own. He took a high tone with me at once, such as an honest man would naturally take with a confessed repudiator. He even brought down his proud stomach so far as to join himself

to me for the rest of my townward walk, that he might give me his views of the American people, and thus inclusively of myself.

I know not whether it is because I am pigeon-livered and lack gall, or whether it is from an overmastering sense of drollery, but I am apt to submit to such bastings with a patience which afterwards surprises me, being not without my share of warmth in the blood. Perhaps it is because I so often meet with young persons who know vastly more than I do, and especially with so many foreigners whose knowledge of this country is superior to my own. However it may be, I listened for some time with tolerable composure as my self-appointed lecturer gave me in detail his opinions of my country and its people. America, he informed me, was without arts, science, literature, culture, or any native hope of supplying them. We were a people wholly given to money-getting, and who, having got it, knew no other use for it than to hold it fast. I am fain to confess that I felt a sensible itching of the biceps, and that my fingers closed with such a grip as he had just informed me was one of the effects of our unhappy climate. But happening just then to be where I could avoid temptation by dodging down a by-street, I hastily left him to finish his diatribe to the lamp-post, which could stand it better than I. That young man will never know how near he came to being assaulted by a respectable gentleman of middle age, at the corner of Church Street. I have never felt quite satisfied that I did all my

duty by him in not knocking him down. But perhaps he might have knocked *me* down, and then?

The capacity of indignation makes an essential part of the outfit of every honest man, but I am inclined to doubt whether he is a wise one who allows himself to act upon its first hints. It should be rather, I suspect, a *latent* heat in the blood, which makes itself felt in character, a steady reserve for the brain, warming the ovum of thought to life, rather than cooking it by a too hasty enthusiasm in reaching the boiling-point. As my pulse gradually fell back to its normal beat, I reflected that I had been uncomfortably near making a fool of myself, — a handy salve of euphuism for our vanity, though it does not always make a just allowance to Nature for her share in the business. What possible claim had my Teutonic friend to rob me of my composure? I am not, I think, specially thin-skinned as to other people's opinions of myself, having, as I conceive, later and fuller intelligence on that point than anybody else can give me. Life is continually weighing us in very sensitive scales, and telling every one of us precisely what his real weight is to the last grain of dust. Whoever at fifty does not rate himself quite as low as most of his acquaintance would be likely to put him, must be either a fool or a great man, and I humbly disclaim being either. But if I was not smarting in person from any scattering shot of my late companion's commination, why should I grow hot at any implication of my country therein? Surely *her* shoulders are broad enough, if yours or

mine are not, to bear up under a considerable avalanche of this kind. It is the bit of truth in every slander, the hint of likeness in every caricature, that makes us smart. "Art thou *there*, old Truepenny?" How did your blade know its way so well to that one loose rivet in our armor? I wondered whether Americans were over-sensitive in this respect, whether they were more touchy than other folks. On the whole, I thought we were not. Plutarch, who at least had studied philosophy, if he had not mastered it, could not stomach something Herodotus had said of Bœotia, and devoted an essay to showing up the delightful old traveller's malice and ill-breeding. French editors leave out of Montaigne's "Travels" some remarks of his about France, for reasons best known to themselves. Pachydermatous Deutschland, covered with trophies from every field of letters, still winces under that question which Père Bouhours put two centuries ago, *Si un Allemand peut être bel-esprit?* John Bull grew apoplectic with angry amazement at the audacious persiflage of Pückler-Muskau. To be sure, he was a prince, — but that was not all of it, for a chance phrase of gentle Hawthorne sent a spasm through all the journals of England. Then this tenderness is not peculiar to *us?* Console yourself, dear man and brother, whatever else you may be sure of, be sure at least of this, that you are dreadfully like other people. Human nature has a much greater genius for sameness than for originality, or the world would be at a sad pass shortly. The surprising thing is that

men have such a taste for this somewhat musty flavor, that an Englishman, for example, should feel himself defrauded, nay, even outraged, when he comes over here and finds a people speaking what he admits to be something like English, and yet so very different from (or, as he would say, to) those he left at home. Nothing, I am sure, equals *my* thankfulness when I meet an Englishman who is *not* like every other, or, I may add, an American of the same odd turn.

Certainly it is no shame to a man that he should be as nice about his country as about his sweetheart, and who ever heard even the friendliest appreciation of that unexpressive she that did not seem to fall infinitely short? Yet it would hardly be wise to hold every one an enemy who could not see her with our own enchanted eyes. It seems to be the common opinion of foreigners that Americans are *too* tender upon this point. Perhaps we are; and if so, there must be a reason for it. Have we had fair play? Could the eyes of what is called Good Society (though it is so seldom true either to the adjective or noun) look upon a nation of democrats with any chance of receiving an undistorted image? Were not those, moreover, who found in the old order of things an earthly paradise, paying them quarterly dividends for the wisdom of their ancestors, with the punctuality of the seasons, unconsciously bribed to misunderstand if not to misrepresent us? Whether at war or at peace, there we were, a standing menace to all earthly paradises of that kind, fatal underminers of the

very credit on which the dividends were based, all the more hateful and terrible that our destructive agency was so insidious, working invisible in the elements, as it seemed, active while they slept, and coming upon them in the darkness like an armed man. *Could* Laius have the proper feelings of a father towards Œdipus, announced as his destined destroyer by infallible oracles, and felt to be such by every conscious fibre of his soul? For more than a century the Dutch were the laughing-stock of polite Europe. They were butter-firkins, swillers of beer and schnaps, and their *vrouws* from whom Holbein painted the all-but loveliest of Madonnas, Rembrandt the graceful girl who sits immortal on his knee in Dresden, and Rubens his abounding goddesses, were the synonymes of clumsy vulgarity. Even so late as Irving the ships of the greatest navigators in the world were represented as sailing equally well stern-foremost. That the aristocratic Venetians should have

> "Riveted with gigantic piles
> Thorough the centre their new-catchëd miles,"

was heroic. But the far more marvellous achievement of the Dutch in the same kind was ludicrous even to republican Marvell. Meanwhile, during that very century of scorn, they were the best artists, sailors, merchants, bankers, printers, scholars, jurisconsults, and statesmen in Europe, and the genius of Motley has revealed them to us, earning a right to themselves by the most heroic struggle in human annals. But, alas! they were not merely simple burghers who had fairly made themselves

High Mightinesses, and could treat on equal terms with anointed kings, but their commonwealth carried in its bosom the germs of democracy. They even unmuzzled, at least after dark, that dreadful mastiff, the Press, whose scent is, or ought to be, so keen for wolves in sheep's clothing and for certain other animals in lions' skins. They made fun of Sacred Majesty, and, what was worse, managed uncommonly well without it. In an age when periwigs made so large a part of the natural dignity of man, people with such a turn of mind were dangerous. How could they seem other than vulgar and hateful?

In the natural course of things we succeeded to this unenviable position of general butt. The Dutch had thriven under it pretty well, and there was hope that we could at least contrive to worry along. And we certainly did in a very redoubtable fashion. Perhaps we deserved some of the sarcasm more than our Dutch predecessors in office. We had nothing to boast of in arts or letters, and were given to bragging overmuch of our merely material prosperity, due quite as much to the virtue of our continent as to our own. There was some truth in Carlyle's sneer, after all. Till we had succeeded in some higher way than this, we had only the success of physical growth. Our greatness, like that of enormous Russia, was greatness on the map, — barbarian mass only; but had we gone down, like that other Atlantis, in some vast cataclysm, we should have covered but a pin's point on the chart of memory, compared with those ideal spaces occu-

pied by tiny Attica and cramped England. At the same time, our critics somewhat too easily forgot that material must make ready the foundation for ideal triumphs, that the arts have no chance in poor countries. But it must be allowed that democracy stood for a great deal in our shortcoming. The Edinburgh Review never would have thought of asking, "Who reads a Russian book?" and England was satisfied with iron from Sweden without being impertinently inquisitive after her painters and statuaries. Was it that they expected too much from the mere miracle of Freedom? Is it not the highest art of a Republic to make men of flesh and blood, and not the marble ideals of such? It may be fairly doubted whether we have produced this higher type of man yet. Perhaps it is the collective, not the individual, humanity that is to have a chance of nobler development among us. We shall see. We have a vast amount of imported ignorance, and, still worse, of native ready-made knowledge, to digest before even the preliminaries of such a consummation can be arranged. We have got to learn that statesmanship is the most complicated of all arts, and to come back to the apprenticeship-system too hastily abandoned. At present, we trust a man with making constitutions on less proof of competence than we should demand before we gave him our shoe to patch. We have nearly reached the limit of the reaction from the old notion, which paid too much regard to birth and station as qualifications for office, and have touched the extreme point in the opposite direction,

putting the highest of human functions up at auction to be bid for by any creature capable of going upright on two legs. In some places, we have arrived at a point at which civil society is no longer possible, and already another reaction has begun, not backwards to the old system, but towards fitness either from natural aptitude or special training. But will it always be safe to let evils work their own cure by becoming unendurable? Every one of them leaves its taint in the constitution of the body-politic, each in itself, perhaps, trifling, yet all together powerful for evil.

But whatever we might do or leave undone, we were not genteel, and it was uncomfortable to be continually reminded that, though we should boast that we were the Great West till we were black in the face, it did not bring us an inch nearer to the world's West-End. That sacred enclosure of respectability was tabooed to us. The Holy Alliance did not inscribe us on its visiting-list. The Old World of wigs and orders and liveries would shop with us, but we must ring at the area-bell, and not venture to awaken the more august clamors of the knocker. Our manners, it must be granted, had none of those graces that stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, in whatever museum of British antiquities they may be hidden. In short, we were vulgar.

This was one of those horribly vague accusations, the victim of which has no defence. An umbrella is of no avail against a Scotch mist. It envelops you, it penetrates at every pore, it wets you through without seeming to wet you at all. Vulgarity is

an eighth deadly sin, added to the list in these latter days, and worse than all the others put together, since it perils your salvation in *this* world, — far the more important of the two in the minds of most men. It profits nothing to draw nice distinctions between essential and conventional, for the convention in this case *is* the essence, and you may break every command of the decalogue with perfect good-breeding, nay, if you are adroit, without losing caste. We, indeed, had it not to lose, for we had never gained it. "*How* am I vulgar?" asks the culprit, shudderingly. "Because thou art not like unto Us," answers Lucifer, Son of the Morning, and there is no more to be said. The god of this world may be a fallen angel, but he has us *there!* We were as clean, — so far as my observation goes, I think we were cleaner, morally and physically, than the English, and therefore, of course, than everybody else. But we did not pronounce the diphthong *ou* as they did, and we said *eether* and not *eyther*, following therein the fashion of our ancestors, who unhappily could bring over no English better than Shakespeare's; and we did not stammer as they had learned to do from the courtiers, who in this way flattered the Hanoverian king, a foreigner among the people he had come to reign over. Worse than all, we might have the noblest ideas and the finest sentiments in the world, but we vented them through that organ by which men are led rather than leaders, though some physiologists would persuade us that Nature furnishes her captains with a fine handle to their

faces that Opportunity may get a good purchase on them for dragging them to the front.

This state of things was so painful that excellent people were not wanting who gave their whole genius to reproducing here the original Bull, whether by gaiters, the cut of their whiskers, by a factitious brutality in their tone, or by an accent that was forever tripping and falling flat over the tangled roots of our common tongue. Martyrs to a false ideal, it never occurred to them that nothing is more hateful to gods and men than a second-rate Englishman, and for the very reason that this planet never produced a more splendid creature than the first-rate one, witness Shakespeare and the Indian Mutiny. Witness that truly sublime self-abnegation of those prisoners lately among the bandits of Greece, where average men gave an example of quiet fortitude for which all the stoicism of antiquity can show no match. Witness the wreck of the Birkenhead, an example of disciplined heroism, perhaps the most precious, as the rarest, of all. If we could contrive to be not too unobtrusively our simple selves, we should be the most delightful of human beings, and the most original; whereas, when the plating of Anglicism rubs off, as it always will in points that come to much wear, we are liable to very unpleasing conjectures about the quality of the metal underneath. Perhaps one reason why the average Briton spreads himself here with such an easy air of superiority may be owing to the fact that he meets with so many bad imitations as to conclude himself the only real thing

in a wilderness of shams. He fancies himself moving through an endless Bloomsbury, where his mere apparition confers honor as an avatar of the court-end of the universe. Not a Bull of them all but is persuaded he bears Europa upon his back. This is the sort of fellow whose patronage is so divertingly insufferable. Thank Heaven he is not the only specimen of cater-cousinship from the dear old Mother Island that is shown to us! Among genuine things, I know nothing more genuine than the better men whose limbs were made in England. So manly-tender, so brave, so true, so warranted to wear, they make us proud to feel that blood is thicker than water.

But it is not merely the Englishman; every European candidly admits in himself some right of primogeniture in respect of us, and pats this shaggy continent on the back with a lively sense of generous unbending. The German who plays the bass-viol has a well-founded contempt, which he is not always nice in concealing, for a country so few of whose children ever take that noble instrument between their knees. His cousin, the Ph. D. from Göttingen, cannot help despising a people who do not grow loud and red over Aryans and Turanians, and are indifferent about their descent from either. The Frenchman feels an easy mastery in speaking his mother tongue, and attributes it to some native superiority of parts that lifts him high above us barbarians of the West. The Italian *prima donna* sweeps a curtsy of careless pity to the over-facile pit which unsexes her with the *bravo!* innocently

meant to show a familiarity with foreign usage. But all without exception make no secret of regarding us as the goose bound to deliver them a golden egg in return for *their* cackle. Such men as Agassiz, Guyot, and Goldwin Smith come with gifts in their hands; but since it is commonly European failures who bring hither their remarkable gifts and acquirements, this view of the case is sometimes just the least bit in the world provoking. To think what a delicious seclusion of contempt we enjoyed till California and our own ostentatious *parvenus*, flinging gold away in Europe that might have endowed libraries at home, gave us the ill repute of riches! What a shabby downfall from the Arcadia which the French officers of our Revolutionary War fancied they saw here through Rousseau-tinted spectacles! Something of Arcadia there really was, something of the Old Age; and that divine provincialism were cheaply repurchased could we have it back again in exchange for the tawdry upholstery that has taken its place.

For some reason or other, the European has rarely been able to see America except in caricature. Would the first Review of the world have printed the *niaiseries* of M. Maurice Sand as a picture of society in any civilized country? M. Sand, to be sure, has inherited nothing of his famous mother's literary outfit, except the pseudonym. But since the conductors of the *Revue* could not have published his story because it was clever, they must have thought it valuable for its truth. As true as the last-century Englishman's

picture of Jean Crapaud! We do not ask to be sprinkled with rosewater, but may perhaps fairly protest against being drenched with the rinsings of an unclean imagination. The next time the *Revue* allows such ill-bred persons to throw their slops out of its first-floor windows, let it honestly preface the discharge with a *gare l' eau!* that we may run from under in season. And M. Duvergier de Hauranne, who knows how to be entertaining! I know that *le Français est plutôt indiscret que confiant*, and the pen slides too easily when indiscretions will fetch so much a page; but should we not have been *tant-soit-peu* more cautious had we been writing about people on the other side of the Channel? But then it is a fact in the natural history of the American long familiar to Europeans, that he abhors privacy, knows not the meaning of reserve, lives in hotels because of their greater publicity, and is never so pleased as when his domestic affairs (if he may be said to have any) are paraded in the newspapers. Barnum, it is well known, represents perfectly the average national sentiment in this respect. However it be, we are not treated like other people, or perhaps I should say like people who are ever likely to be met with in society.

Is it in the climate? Either I have a false notion of European manners, or else the atmosphere affects them strangely when exported hither. Perhaps they suffer from the sea-voyage like some of the more delicate wines. During our Civil War an English gentleman of the highest description was kind enough to call upon me, mainly, as it

seemed, to inform me how entirely he sympathized with the Confederates, and how sure he felt that we could never subdue them, — "they were the *gentlemen* of the country, you know." Another, the first greetings hardly over, asked me how I accounted for the universal meagreness of my countrymen. To a thinner man than I, or from a stouter man than he, the question *might* have been offensive. The Marquis of Hartington[1] wore a secession badge at a public ball in New York. In a civilized country he might have been roughly handled; but here, where the *bienséances* are not so well understood, of course nobody minded it. A French traveller told me he had been a good deal in the British colonies, and had been astonished to see how soon the people became Americanized. He added, with delightful *bonhomie*, and as if he were sure it would charm me, that "they even began to talk through their noses, just like you!" I was naturally ravished with this testimony to the assimilating power of democracy, and could only reply that I hoped they would never adopt our democratic patent-method of seeming to settle one's honest debts, for they would find it paying through the nose in the long-run. I am a man

[1] One of Mr. Lincoln's neatest strokes of humor was his treatment of this gentleman when a laudable curiosity induced him to be presented to the President of the Broken Bubble. Mr. Lincoln persisted in calling him Mr. Partington. Surely the refinement of good-breeding could go no further. Giving the young man his real name (already notorious in the newspapers) would have made his visit an insult. Had Henri IV. done this, it would have been famous.

of the New World, and do not know precisely the present fashion of May-Fair, but I have a kind of feeling that if an American (*mutato nomine, de te* is always frightfully possible) were to do this kind of thing under a European roof, it would induce some disagreeable reflections as to the ethical results of democracy. I read the other day in print the remark of a British tourist who had eaten large quantities of our salt, such as it is (I grant it has not the European savor), that the Americans were hospitable, no doubt, but that it was partly because they longed for foreign visitors to relieve the tedium of their dead-level existence, and partly from ostentation. What shall we do? Shall we close our doors? Not I, for one, if I should so have forfeited the friendship of L. S., most lovable of men. He somehow seems to find us human, at least, and so did Clough, whose poetry will one of these days, perhaps, be found to have been the best utterance in verse of this generation. And T. H., the mere grasp of whose manly hand carries with it the pledge of frankness and friendship, of an abiding simplicity of nature as affecting as it is rare!

The fine old Tory aversion of former times was not hard to bear. There was something even refreshing in it, as in a northeaster to a hardy temperament. When a British parson, travelling in Newfoundland while the slash of our separation was still raw, after prophesying a glorious future for an island that continued to dry its fish under the ægis of Saint George, glances disdainfully over his

spectacles in parting at the U. S. A., and forebodes for them a "speedy relapse into barbarism," now that they have madly cut themselves off from the humanizing influences of Britain, I smile with barbarian self-conceit. But this kind of thing became by degrees an unpleasant anachronism. For meanwhile the young giant was growing, was beginning indeed to feel tight in his clothes, was obliged to let in a gore here and there in Texas, in California, in New Mexico, in Alaska, and had the scissors and needle and thread ready for Canada when the time came. His shadow loomed like a Brocken-spectre over against Europe, — the shadow of what they were coming to, that was the unpleasant part of it. Even in such misty image as they had of him, it was painfully evident that his clothes were not of any cut hitherto fashionable, nor conceivable by a Bond Street tailor, — and this in an age, too, when everything depends upon clothes, when, if we do not keep up appearances, the seeming-solid frame of this universe, nay, your very God, would slump into himself, like a mockery king of snow, being nothing, after all, but a prevailing mode, a make-believe of believing. From this moment the young giant assumed the respectable aspect of a phenomenon, to be got rid of if possible, but at any rate as legitimate a subject of human study as the glacial period or the silurian what-d'ye-call-ems. If the man of the primeval drift-heaps be so absorbingly interesting, why not the man of the drift that is just beginning, of the drift into whose irresistible current we are just being sucked whether we

will or no? If I were in their place, I confess I should not be frightened. Man has survived so much, and contrived to be comfortable on this planet after surviving so much! I am something of a protestant in matters of government also, and am willing to get rid of vestments and ceremonies and to come down to bare benches, if only faith in God take the place of a general agreement to profess confidence in ritual and sham. Every mortal man of us holds stock in the only public debt that is absolutely sure of payment, and that is the debt of the Maker of this Universe to the Universe he has made. I have no notion of selling out my shares in a panic.

It was something to have advanced even to the dignity of a phenomenon, and yet I do not know that the relation of the individual American to the individual European was bettered by it; and that, after all, must adjust itself comfortably before there can be a right understanding between the two. We had been a desert, we became a museum. People came hither for scientific and not social ends. The very cockney could not complete his education without taking a vacant stare at us in passing. But the sociologists (I think they call themselves so) were the hardest to bear. There was no escape. I have even known a professor of this fearful science to come disguised in petticoats. We were cross-examined as a chemist cross-examines a new substance. Human? yes, all the elements are present, though abnormally combined. Civilized? Hm! that needs a stricter assay. No

entomologist could take a more friendly interest in a strange bug. After a few such experiences, I, for one, have felt as if I were merely one of those horrid things preserved in spirits (and very bad spirits, too) in a cabinet. I was not the fellow-being of these explorers: I was a curiosity; I was a *specimen*. Hath not an American organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions even as a European hath? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? I will not keep on with Shylock to his next question but one.

Till after our Civil War it never seemed to enter the head of any foreigner, especially of any Englishman, that an American had what could be called a country, except as a place to eat, sleep, and trade in. Then it seemed to strike them suddenly. "By Jove, you know, fellahs don't fight like that for a shop-till!" No, I rather think not. To Americans America is something more than a promise and an expectation. It has a past and traditions of its own. A descent from men who sacrificed everything and came hither, not to better their fortunes, but to plant their idea in virgin soil, should be a good pedigree. There was never colony save this that went forth, not to seek gold, but God. Is it not as well to have sprung from such as these as from some burly beggar who came over with Wilhelmus Conquestor, unless, indeed, a line grow better as it runs farther away from stalwart ancestors? And for our history, it is dry enough, no doubt, in the books, but, for all that, is of a kind that tells in the blood. I have admitted

that Carlyle's sneer had a show of truth in it. But what does he himself, like a true Scot, admire in the Hohenzollerns? First of all, that they were *canny*, a thrifty, forehanded race. Next, that they made a good fight from generation to generation with the chaos around them. That is precisely the battle which the English race on this continent has been pushing doughtily forward for two centuries and a half. Doughtily and silently, for you cannot hear in Europe "that crash, the death-song of the perfect tree," that has been going on here from sturdy father to sturdy son, and making this continent habitable for the weaker Old World breed that has swarmed to it during the last half-century. If ever men did a good stroke of work on this planet, it was the forefathers of those whom you are wondering whether it would not be prudent to acknowledge as far-off cousins. Alas, man of genius, to whom we owe so much, could you see nothing more than the burning of a foul chimney in that clash of Michael and Satan which flamed up under your very eyes?

Before our war we were to Europe but a huge mob of adventurers and shopkeepers. Leigh Hunt expressed it well enough when he said that he could never think of America without seeing a gigantic counter stretched all along the seaboard. And Leigh Hunt, without knowing it, had been more than half Americanized, too! Feudalism had by degrees made commerce, the great civilizer, contemptible. But a tradesman with sword on thigh and very prompt of stroke was not only

redoubtable, he had become respectable also. Few people, I suspect, alluded twice to a needle in Sir John Hawkwood's presence, after that doughty fighter had exchanged it for a more dangerous tool of the same metal. Democracy had been hitherto only a ludicrous effort to reverse the laws of nature by thrusting Cleon into the place of Pericles. But a democracy that could fight for an abstraction, whose members held life and goods cheap compared with that larger life which we call country, was not merely unheard-of, but portentous. It was the nightmare of the Old World taking upon itself flesh and blood, turning out to be substance and not dream. Since the Norman crusader clanged down upon the throne of the *porphyro-geniti*, carefully-draped appearances had never received such a shock, had never been so rudely called on to produce their titles to the empire of the world. Authority has had its periods not unlike those of geology, and at last comes Man claiming kingship in right of his mere manhood. The world of the Saurians might be in some respects more picturesque, but the march of events is inexorable, and that world is bygone.

The young giant had certainly got out of long-clothes. He had become the *enfant terrible* of the human household. It was not and will not be easy for the world (especially for our British cousins) to look upon us as grown up. The youngest of nations, its people must also be young and to be treated accordingly, was the syllogism, — as if libraries did not make all nations equally old in all those

respects, at least, where age is an advantage and not a defect. Youth, no doubt, has its good qualities, as people feel who are losing it, but boyishness is another thing. We had been somewhat boyish as a nation, a little loud, a little pushing, a little braggart. But might it not partly have been because we felt that we had certain claims to respect that were not admitted? The war which established our position as a vigorous nationality has also sobered us. A nation, like a man, cannot look death in the eye for four years without some strange reflections, without arriving at some clearer consciousness of the stuff it is made of, without some great moral change. Such a change, or the beginning of it, no observant person can fail to see here. Our thought and our politics, our bearing as a people, are assuming a manlier tone. We have been compelled to see what was weak in democracy as well as what was strong. We have begun obscurely to recognize that things do not go of themselves, and that popular government is not in itself a panacea, is no better than any other form except as the virtue and wisdom of the people make it so, and that when men undertake to do their own kingship, they enter upon the dangers and responsibilities as well as the privileges of the function. Above all, it looks as if we were on the way to be persuaded that no government can be carried on by declamation. It is noticeable also that facility of communication has made the best English and French thought far more directly operative here than ever before. Without being

Europeanized, our discussion of important questions in statesmanship, in political economy, in æsthetics, is taking a broader scope and a higher tone. It had certainly been provincial, one might almost say local, to a very unpleasant extent. Perhaps our experience in soldiership has taught us to value training more than we have been popularly wont. We may possibly come to the conclusion, one of these days, that self-made men may not be always equally skilful in the manufacture of wisdom, may not be divinely commissioned to fabricate the higher qualities of opinion on all possible topics of human interest.

So long as we continue to be the most common-schooled and the least cultivated people in the world, I suppose we must consent to endure this condescending manner of foreigners toward us. The more friendly they mean to be, the more ludicrously prominent it becomes. They can never appreciate the immense amount of silent work that has been done here, making this continent slowly fit for the abode of man, and which will demonstrate itself, let us hope, in the character of the people. Outsiders can only be expected to judge a nation by the amount it has contributed to the civilization of the world; the amount, that is, that can be seen and handled. A great place in history can only be achieved by competitive examinations, nay, by a long course of them. How much new thought have we contributed to the common stock? Till that question can be triumphantly answered, or needs no answer, we must continue to be simply interesting as an exper-

iment, to be studied as a problem, and not respected as an attained result or an accomplished solution. Perhaps, as I have hinted, their patronizing manner toward us is the fair result of their failing to see here anything more than a poor imitation, a plaster-cast of Europe. And are they not partly right? If the tone of the uncultivated American has too often the arrogance of the barbarian, is not that of the cultivated as often vulgarly apologetic? In the America they meet with is there the simplicity, the manliness, the absence of sham, the sincere human nature, the sensitiveness to duty and implied obligation, that in any way distinguishes us from what our orators call "the effete civilization of the Old World"? Is there a politician among us daring enough (except a Dana here and there) to risk his future on the chance of our keeping our word with the exactness of superstitious communities like England? Is it certain that we shall be ashamed of a bankruptcy of honor, if we can only keep the letter of our bond? I hope we shall be able to answer all these questions with a frank *yes*. At any rate, we would advise our visitors that we are not merely curious creatures, but belong to the family of man, and that, as individuals, we are not to be always subjected to the competitive examination above mentioned, even if we acknowledged their competence as an examining board. Above all, we beg them to remember that America is not to us, as to them, a mere object of external interest to be discussed and analyzed, but *in* us, part of our very marrow. Let them not suppose that we conceive of ourselves as exiles

from the graces and amenities of an older date than we, though very much at home in a state of things not yet all it might be or should be, but which we mean to make so, and which we find both wholesome and pleasant for men (though perhaps not for *dilettanti*) to live in. "The full tide of human existence" may be felt here as keenly as Johnson felt it at Charing Cross, and in a larger sense. I know one person who is singular enough to think Cambridge the very best spot on the habitable globe. "Doubtless God *could* have made a better, but doubtless he never did."

It will take England a great while to get over her airs of patronage toward us, or even passably to conceal them. She cannot help confounding the people with the country, and regarding us as lusty juveniles. She has a conviction that whatever good there is in us is wholly English, when the truth is that we are worth nothing except so far as we have disinfected ourselves of Anglicism. She is especially condescending just now, and lavishes sugar-plums on us as if we had not outgrown them. I am no believer in sudden conversions, especially in sudden conversions to a favorable opinion of people who have just proved you to be mistaken in judgment and therefore unwise in policy. I never blamed her for not wishing well to democracy, — how should she? — but Alabamas are not wishes. Let her not be too hasty in believing Mr. Reverdy Johnson's pleasant words. Though there is no thoughtful man in America who would not consider a war with England the

greatest of calamities, yet the feeling towards her here is very far from cordial, whatever our Minister may say in the effusion that comes after ample dining. Mr. Adams, with his famous "My Lord, this means war," perfectly represented his country. Justly or not, we have a feeling that we have been wronged, not merely insulted. The only sure way of bringing about a healthy relation between the two countries is for Englishmen to clear their minds of the notion that we are always to be treated as a kind of inferior and deported Englishman whose nature they perfectly understand, and whose back they accordingly stroke the wrong way of the fur with amazing perseverance. Let them learn to treat us naturally on our merits as human beings, as they would a German or a Frenchman, and not as if we were a kind of counterfeit Briton whose crime appeared in every shade of difference, and before long there would come that right feeling which we naturally call a good understanding. The common blood, and still more the common language, are fatal instruments of misapprehension. Let them give up *trying* to understand us, still more thinking that they do, and acting in various absurd ways as the necessary consequence, for they will never arrive at that devoutly-to-be-wished consummation, till they learn to look at us as we are and not as they suppose us to be. Dear old long-estranged mother-in-law, it is a great many years since we parted. Since 1660, when you married again, you have been a step-mother to us. Put on your spectacles, dear madam. Yes, we *have* grown,

and changed likewise. You would not let us darken your doors, if you could help it. We know that perfectly well. But pray, when we look to be treated as men, don't shake that rattle in our faces, nor talk baby to us any longer.

> "Do, child, go to it grandam, child;
> Give grandam kingdom, and it grandam will
> Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig!"

A GOOD WORD FOR WINTER

1870

"MEN scarcely know how beautiful fire is," says Shelley; and I am apt to think there are a good many other things concerning which their knowledge might be largely increased without becoming burdensome. Nor are they altogether reluctant to be taught, — not so reluctant, perhaps, as unable, — and education is sure to find one fulcrum ready to her hand by which to get a purchase on them. For most of us, I have noticed, are not without an amiable willingness to assist at any spectacle or entertainment (loosely so called) for which no fee is charged at the door. If special tickets are sent us, another element of pleasure is added in a sense of privilege and preëminence (pitiably scarce in a democracy) so deeply rooted in human nature that I have seen people take a strange satisfaction in being near of kin to the mute chief personage in a funeral. It gave them a moment's advantage over the rest of us whose grief was rated at a lower place in the procession. But the words "admission free" at the bottom of a handbill, though holding out no bait of inequality, have yet a singular charm for many minds, especially in the country. There is something touching in the constancy

with which men attend free lectures, and in the honest patience with which they listen to them. He who pays may yawn or shift testily in his seat, or even go out with an awful reverberation of criticism, for he has bought the right to do any or all of these and paid for it. But gratuitous hearers are anæsthetized to suffering by a sense of virtue. They are performing perhaps the noblest, as it is one of the most difficult, of human functions in getting Something (no matter how small) for Nothing. They are not pestered by the awful duty of securing their money's worth. They are wasting time, to do which elegantly and without lassitude is the highest achievement of civilization. If they are cheated, it is, at worst, only of a superfluous hour which was rotting on their hands. Not only is mere amusement made more piquant, but instruction more palatable, by this universally relished sauce of gratuity. And if the philosophic observer finds an object of agreeable contemplation in the audience, as they listen to a discourse on the probability of making missionaries go down better with the Feejee-Islanders by balancing the hymn-book in one pocket with a bottle of Worcestershire in the other, or to a plea for arming the female gorilla with the ballot, he also takes a friendly interest in the lecturer, and admires the wise economy of Nature who thus contrives an ample field of honest labor for her bores. Even when the insidious hat is passed round after one of these eleemosynary feasts, the relish is but heightened by a conscientious refusal to disturb the satisfaction's

completeness with the rattle of a single contributory penny. So firmly persuaded am I of this *gratis*-instinct in our common humanity, that I believe I could fill a house by advertising a free lecture on Tupper considered as a philosophic poet, or on my personal recollections of the late James K. Polk. This being so, I have sometimes wondered that the peep-shows which Nature provides with such endless variety for her children, and to which we are admitted on the bare condition of having eyes, should be so generally neglected. To be sure, eyes are not so common as people think, or poets would be plentier, and perhaps also these exhibitions of hers are cheapened in estimation by the fact that in enjoying them we are not getting the better of anybody else. Your true lovers of nature, however, contrive to get even *this* solace; and Wordsworth, looking upon mountains as his own peculiar sweethearts, was jealous of anybody else who ventured upon even the most innocent flirtation with them. As if *such* fellows, indeed, could pretend to that nicer sense of what-d'ye-call-it which was so remarkable in him! Marry come up! Mountains, no doubt, may inspire a profounder and more exclusive passion, but on the whole I am not sorry to have been born and bred among more domestic scenes, where I can be hospitable without a pang. I am going to ask you presently to take potluck with me at a board where Winter shall supply whatever there is of cheer.

I think the old fellow has hitherto had scant justice done him in the main. We make him the

symbol of old age or death, and think we have settled the matter. As if old age were never kindly as well as frosty; as if it had no reverend graces of its own as good in their way as the noisy impertinence of childhood, the elbowing self-conceit of youth, or the pompous mediocrity of middle life! As if there were anything discreditable in death, or nobody had ever longed for it! Suppose we grant that Winter is the sleep of the year, what then? I take it upon me to say that his dreams are finer than the best reality of his waking rivals.

"Sleep, Silence' child, the father of soft Rest,"

is a very agreeable acquaintance, and most of us are better employed in his company than anywhere else. For my own part, I think Winter a pretty wide-awake old boy, and his bluff sincerity and hearty ways are more congenial to my mood, and more wholesome for me, than any charms of which his rivals are capable. Spring is a fickle mistress, who either does not know her own mind, or is so long in making it up, whether you shall have her or not have her, that one gets tired at last of her pretty miffs and reconciliations. You go to her to be cheered up a bit, and ten to one catch her in the sulks, expecting you to find enough good-humor for both. After she has become Mrs. Summer she grows a little more staid in her demeanor; and her abundant table, where you are sure to get the earliest fruits and vegetables of the season, is a good foundation for steady friendship; but she has lost that delicious aroma of maiden-

hood, and what was delicately rounded grace in the girl gives more than hints of something like redundance in the matron. Autumn is the poet of the family. He gets you up a splendor that you would say was made out of real sunset; but it is nothing more than a few hectic leaves, when all is done. He is but a sentimentalist, after all; a kind of Lamartine whining along the ancestral avenues he has made bare timber of, and begging a contribution of good-spirits from your own savings to keep him in countenance. But Winter has his delicate sensibilities too, only he does not make them as good as indelicate by thrusting them forever in your face. He is a better poet than Autumn, when he has a mind, but, like a truly great one as he is, he brings you down to your bare manhood, and bids you understand him out of that, with no adventitious helps of association, or he will none of you. He does not touch those melancholy chords on which Autumn is as great a master as Heine. Well, is there no such thing as thrumming on them and maundering over them till they get out of tune, and you wish some manly hand would crash through them and leave them dangling brokenly forever? Take Winter as you find him, and he turns out to be a thoroughly honest fellow, with no nonsense in him, and tolerating none in you, which is a great comfort in the long run. He is not what they call a genial critic; but bring a real man along with you, and you will find there is a crabbed generosity about the old cynic that you would not exchange for all the creamy concessions

of Autumn. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," quotha? That's just it; Winter soon blows your head clear of fog and makes you see things as they are; I thank him for it! The truth is, between ourselves, I have a very good opinion of the whole family, who always welcome me without making me feel as if I were too much of a poor relation. There ought to be some kind of distance, never so little, you know, to give the true relish. They are as good company, the worst of them, as any I know, and I am not a little flattered by a condescension from any one of them; but I happen to hold Winter's retainer, this time, and, like an honest advocate, am bound to make as good a showing as I can for him, even if it cost a few slurs upon the rest of the household. Moreover, Winter is coming, and one would like to get on the blind side of him.

The love of Nature in and for herself, or as a mirror for the moods of the mind, is a modern thing. The fleeing to her as an escape from man was brought into fashion by Rousseau; for his prototype Petrarch, though he had a taste for pretty scenery, had a true antique horror for the grander aspects of nature. He got once to the top of Mont Ventoux, but it is very plain that he did not enjoy it. Indeed, it is only within a century or so that the search after the picturesque has been a safe employment. It is not so even now in Greece or Southern Italy. Where the Anglo-Saxon carves his cold fowl, and leaves the relics of his picnic, the ancient or mediæval man might

be pretty confident that some ruffian would try the edge of his knife on a chicken of the Platonic sort, and leave more precious bones as an offering to the genius of the place. The ancients were certainly more social than we, though that, perhaps, was natural enough, when a good part of the world was still covered with forest. They huddled together in cities as well for safety as to keep their minds warm. The Romans had a fondness for country life, but they had fine roads, and Rome was always within easy reach. The author of the Book of Job is the earliest I know of who showed any profound sense of the moral meaning of the outward world; and I think none has approached him since, though Wordsworth comes nearest with the first two books of the "Prelude." But their feeling is not precisely of the kind I speak of as modern, and which gave rise to what is called descriptive poetry. Chaucer opens his Clerk's Tale with a bit of landscape admirable for its large style, and as well composed as any Claude.

> "There is right at the west end of Itaille,
> Down at the root of Vesulus the cold,
> A lusty plain abundant of vitaille,
> Where many a tower and town thou mayst behold,
> That founded were in time of fathers old,
> And many an other délectable sight;
> And Sálucës this noble country hight."

What an airy precision of touch there is here, and what a sure eye for the points of character in landscape! But the picture is altogether subsidiary. No doubt the works of Salvator Rosa and Gaspar Poussin show that there must have

been some amateur taste for the grand and terrible in scenery; but the British poet Thomson ("sweet-souled" is Wordsworth's apt word) was the first to do with words what they had done partially with colors. He was turgid, no good metrist, and his English is like a translation from one of those poets who wrote in Latin after it was dead; but he was a man of sincere genius, and not only English, but European literature is largely in his debt. He was the inventor of cheap amusement for the million, to be had of All-out-doors for the asking. It was his impulse which unconsciously gave direction to Rousseau, and it is to the school of Jean Jacques that we owe St. Pierre, Cowper, Châteaubriand, Wordsworth, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, Ruskin, — the great painters of ideal landscape.

So long as men had slender means, whether of keeping out cold or checkmating it with artificial heat, Winter was an unwelcome guest, especially in the country. There he was the bearer of a *lettre de cachet*, which shut its victims in solitary confinement with few resources but to boose round the fire and repeat ghost-stories, which had lost all their freshness and none of their terror. To go to bed was to lie awake of cold, with an added shudder of fright whenever a loose casement or a waving curtain chose to give you the goose-flesh. Bussy Rabutin, in one of his letters, gives us a notion how uncomfortable it was in the country, with green wood, smoky chimneys, and doors and windows that thought it was their duty to make the wind whistle,

not to keep it out. With fuel so dear, it could not have been much better in the city, to judge by Ménage's warning against the danger of our dressing-gowns taking fire, while we cuddle too closely over the sparing blaze. The poet of Winter himself is said to have written in bed, with his hand through a hole in the blanket; and we may suspect that it was the warmth quite as much as the company that first drew men together at the coffee-house. Coleridge, in January, 1800, writes to Wedgewood: "I am sitting by a fire in a rug great-coat. . . . It is most barbarously cold, and you, I fear, can shield yourself from it only by perpetual imprisonment." This thermometrical view of winter is, I grant, a depressing one; for I think there is nothing so demoralizing as cold. I know of a boy who, when his father, a bitter economist, was brought home dead, said only, "Now we can burn as much wood as we like." I would not off-hand prophesy the gallows for that boy. I remember with a shudder a pinch I got from the cold once in a railroad-car. A born fanatic of fresh air, I found myself glad to see the windows hermetically sealed by the freezing vapor of our breath, and plotted the assassination of the conductor every time he opened the door. I felt myself sensibly barbarizing, and would have shared Colonel Jack's bed in the ash-hole of the glass-furnace with a grateful heart. Since then I have had more charity for the prevailing ill-opinion of winter. It was natural enough that Ovid should measure the years of his exile in Pontus by the number of winters.

Ut sumus in Ponto, ter frigore constitit Ister,
Facta est Euxini dura ter unda maris:

Thrice hath the cold bound Ister fast, since I
In Pontus was, thrice Euxine's wave made hard.

Jubinal has printed an Anglo-Norman piece of doggerel in which Winter and Summer dispute which is the better man. It is not without a kind of rough and inchoate humor, and I like it because old Whitebeard gets tolerably fair play. The jolly old fellow boasts of his rate of living, with that contempt of poverty which is the weak spot in the burly English nature.

Jà Dieu ne place que me avyenge
Que ne face plus honour
Et plus despenz en un soul jour
Que vus en tote vostre vie:

Now God forbid it hap to me
That I make not more great display,
And spend more in a single day
Than you can do in all your life.

The best touch, perhaps, is Winter's claim for credit as a mender of the highways, which was not without point when every road in Europe was a quagmire during a good part of the year unless it was bottomed on some remains of Roman engineering.

Je su, fet-il, seignur et mestre
Et à bon droit le dey estre,
Quant de la bowe face caucé
Par un petit de geelé:

Master and lord I am, says he,
And of good right so ought to be,
Since I make causeys, safely crost,
Of mud, with just a pinch of frost.

But there is no recognition of Winter as the best of out-door company.[1]

Even Emerson, an open-air man, and a bringer of it, if ever any, confesses,

> "The frost-king ties my fumbling feet,
> Sings in my ear, my hands are stones,
> Curdles the blood to the marble bones,
> Tugs at the heartstrings, numbs the sense,
> And hems in life with narrowing fence."

Winter was literally "the inverted year," as Thomson called him; for such entertainments as could be had must be got within doors. What cheerfulness there was in brumal verse was that of Horace's *dissolve frigus ligna super foco large reponens*, so pleasantly associated with the cleverest scene in Roderick Random. This is the tone of that poem of Walton's friend Cotton, which won the praise of Wordsworth: —

> "Let us home,
> Our mortal enemy is come;
> Winter and all his blustering train
> Have made a voyage o'er the main.
> . . . . . .
> "Fly, fly, the foe advances fast;
> Into our fortress let us haste,
> Where all the roarers of the north
> Can neither storm nor starve us forth.
>
> "There underground a magazine
> Of sovereign juice is cellared in,

[1] Mais vous Yver, trop estes plain
De nège, vent, pluye, e grézil;
Ou vous deust bannir en exil;
Sans point flater, je parle plain,
Yver, vous n'estes qu'un vilain.
Ch. d'Orléans, Chans. xciv.

Liquor that will the siege maintain
Should Phœbus ne'er return again.

. . . . . .

"Whilst we together jovial sit
Careless, and crowned with mirth and wit,
Where, though bleak winds confine us home,
Our fancies round the world shall roam."

Thomson's view of Winter is also, on the whole, a hostile one, though he does justice to his grandeur.

"Thus Winter falls,
A heavy gloom oppressive o'er the world,
Through Nature shedding influence malign."

He finds his consolations, like Cotton, in the house, though more refined: —

"While without
The ceaseless winds blow ice, be my retreat
Between the groaning forest and the shore
Beat by the boundless multitude of waves,
A rural, sheltered, solitary scene,
Where ruddy fire and beaming tapers join
To cheer the gloom. There studious let me sit
And hold high converse with the mighty dead."

Doctor Akenside, a man to be spoken of with respect, follows Thomson. With him, too, "Winter desolates the year," and

"How pleasing wears the wintry night
Spent with the old illustrious dead!
While by the taper's trembling light
I seem those awful scenes to tread
Where chiefs or legislators lie," &c.

Akenside had evidently been reading Thomson. He had the conceptions of a great poet with less faculty than many a little one, and is one of those versifiers of whom it is enough to say that we are always willing to break him off in the middle (as I

have ventured to do) with an &c., well knowing that what follows is but the coming-round again of what went before, marching in a circle with the cheap numerosity of a stage-army. In truth, it is no wonder that the short days of that cloudy northern climate should have added to winter a gloom borrowed of the mind. We hardly know, till we have experienced the contrast, how sensibly our winter is alleviated by the longer daylight and the pellucid atmosphere. I once spent a winter in Dresden, a southern climate compared with England, and really almost lost my respect for the sun when I saw him groping among the chimney-pots opposite my windows as he described his impoverished arc in the sky. The enforced seclusion of the season makes it the time for serious study and occupations that demand fixed incomes of unbroken time. This is why Milton said "that his vein never happily flowed but from the autumnal equinox to the vernal," though in his twentieth year he had written, on the return of spring, —

> Fallor? an et nobis redeunt in carmina vires
> Ingeniumque mihi munere veris adest?
>
> Err I? or do the powers of song return
> To me, and genius too, the gifts of Spring?

Goethe, so far as I remember, was the first to notice the cheerfulness of snow in sunshine. His *Harz-reise im Winter* gives no hint of it, for that is a diluted reminiscence of Greek tragic choruses and the Book of Job in nearly equal parts. In one of the singularly interesting and characteristic letters to Frau von Stein, however, written during

the journey, he says: "It is beautiful indeed; the mist heaps itself together in light snow-clouds, the sun looks through, and the snow over everything gives back a feeling of gayety." But I find in Cowper the first recognition of a general amiability in Winter. The gentleness of his temper, and the wide charity of his sympathies, made it natural for him to find good in everything except the human heart. A dreadful creed distilled from the darkest moments of dyspeptic solitaries compelled him against his will to see in *that* the one evil thing made by a God whose goodness is over all his works. Cowper's two walks in the morning and noon of a winter's day are delightful, so long as he contrives to let himself be happy in the graciousness of the landscape. Your muscles grow springy, and your lungs dilate with the crisp air as you walk along with him. You laugh with him at the grotesque shadow of your legs lengthened across the snow by the just-risen sun. I know nothing that gives a purer feeling of out-door exhilaration than the easy verses of this escaped hypochondriac. But Cowper also preferred his sheltered garden-walk to those robuster joys, and bitterly acknowledged the depressing influence of the darkened year. In December, 1780, he writes: "At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine to divert it from sad subjects, and to fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement." Or was it because he was writing to the dreadful Newton? Perhaps his poetry bears truer

witness to his habitual feeling, for it is only there that poets disenthral themselves of their reserve and become fully possessed of their greatest charm, — the power of being franker than other men. In the Third Book of the Task he boldly affirms his preference of the country to the city even in winter: —

> "But are not wholesome airs, though unperfumed
> By roses, and clear suns, though scarcely felt,
> And groves, if inharmonious, yet secure
> From clamor, and whose very silence charms,
> To be preferred to smoke? . . .
> They would be, were not madness in the head
> And folly in the heart; were England now
> What England was, plain, hospitable kind,
> And undebauched."

The conclusion shows, however, that he was thinking mainly of fireside delights, not of the blusterous companionship of nature. This appears even more clearly in the Fourth Book: —

> "O Winter, ruler of the inverted year";

but I cannot help interrupting him to say how pleasant it always is to track poets through the gardens of their predecessors and find out their likings by a flower snapped off here and there to garnish their own nosegays. Cowper had been reading Thomson, and "the inverted year" pleased his fancy with its suggestion of that starry wheel of the zodiac moving round through its spaces infinite. He could not help loving a handy Latinism (especially with elision beauty added), any more than Gray, any more than Wordsworth, — on the sly. But the member for Olney has the floor: —

"O Winter, ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scattered hair with sleet like ashes filled,
Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age, thy forehead wrapt in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
But urged by storms along its slippery way,
I love thee all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art! Thou hold'st the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
Down to the rosy west, but kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,
And gathering at short notice, in one group,
The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
I crown thee king of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturbed Retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know."

I call this a good *human* bit of writing, imaginative, too, — not so flushed, not so . . . highfaluting (let me dare the odious word!) as the modern style since poets have got hold of a theory that imagination is common-sense turned inside out, and not common-sense sublimed, — but wholesome, masculine, and strong in the simplicity of a mind wholly occupied with its theme. To me Cowper is still the best of our descriptive poets for every-day wear. And what unobtrusive skill he has! How he heightens, for example, your sense of winter-evening seclusion, by the twanging horn of the postman on the bridge! That horn has rung in my ears ever

since I first heard it, during the consulate of the second Adams. Wordsworth strikes a deeper note; but does it not sometimes come over one (just the least in the world) that one would give anything for a bit of nature pure and simple, without quite so strong a flavor of W. W.? W. W. is, of course, sublime and all that — but! For my part, I will make a clean breast of it, and confess that I can't look at a mountain without fancying the late laureate's gigantic Roman nose thrust between me and it, and thinking of Dean Swift's profane version of *Romanos rerum dominos* into *Roman nose! a rare un! dom your nose!* But do I judge verses, then, by the impression made on me by the man who wrote them? Not so fast, my good friend, but, for good or evil, the character and its intellectual product are inextricably interfused.

If I remember aright, Wordsworth himself (except in his magnificent skating-scene in the "Prelude") has not much to say for winter out of doors. I cannot recall any picture by him of a snow-storm. The reason may possibly be that in the Lake Country even the winter storms bring rain rather than snow. He was thankful for the Christmas visits of Crabb Robinson, because they "helped him through the winter." His only hearty praise of winter is when, as Général Février, he defeats the French: —

> "Humanity, delighting to behold
> A fond reflection of her own decay,
> Hath painted Winter like a traveller old,
> Propped on a staff, and, through the sullen day,
> In hooded mantle, limping o'er the plain

As though his weakness were disturbed by pain:
Or, if a juster fancy should allow
An undisputed symbol of command,
The chosen sceptre is a withered bough
Infirmly grasped within a withered hand.
These emblems suit the helpless and forlorn;
But mighty Winter the device shall scorn."

The Scottish poet Grahame, in his "Sabbath," says manfully: —

"Now is the time
To visit Nature in her grand attire";

and he has one little picture which no other poet has surpassed: —

"High-ridged the whirlèd drift has almost reached
The powdered keystone of the churchyard porch:
Mute hangs the hooded bell; the tombs lie buried."

Even in our own climate, where the sun shows his winter face as long and as brightly as in central Italy, the seduction of the chimney-corner is apt to predominate in the mind over the severer satisfactions of muffled fields and penitential woods. The very title of Whittier's delightful "Snow-Bound" shows what *he* was thinking of, though he does vapor a little about digging out paths. The verses of Emerson, perfect as a Greek fragment (despite the archaism of a dissyllabic fire), which he has chosen for his epigraph, tell us, too, how the

"Housemates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm."

They are all in a tale. It is always the *tristis Hiems* of Virgil. Catch one of them having a kind word for old Barbe Fleurie, unless he whines

through some cranny, like a beggar, to heighten their enjoyment while they toast their slippered toes. I grant there is a keen relish of contrast about the bickering flame as it gives an emphasis beyond Gherardo della Notte to loved faces, or kindles the gloomy gold of volumes scarce less friendly, especially when a tempest is blundering round the house. Wordsworth has a fine touch that brings home to us the comfortable contrast of without and within, during a storm at night, and the passage is highly characteristic of a poet whose inspiration always has an undertone of *bourgeois:*

> "How touching, when, at midnight, sweep
> Snow-muffled winds, and all is dark,
> To hear, — and sink again to sleep!"

J. H., one of those choice poets who will not tarnish their bright fancies by publication, always insists on a snow-storm as essential to the true atmosphere of whist. Mrs. Battles, in her famous rule for the game, implies winter, and would doubtless have added tempest, if it could be had for the asking. For a good solid read also, into the small hours, there is nothing like that sense of safety against having your evening laid waste, which Euroclydon brings, as he bellows down the chimney, making your fire gasp, or rustles snow-flakes against the pane with a sound more soothing than silence. Emerson, as he is apt to do, not only hit the nail on the head, but drove it home, in that last phrase of the "tumultuous privacy."

But I would exchange this, and give something to boot, for the privilege of walking out into the

vast blur of a north-northeast snow-storm, and getting a strong draught on the furnace within, by drawing the first furrows through its sandy drifts. I love those

> "Noontide twilights which snow makes
> With tempest of the blinding flakes."

If the wind veer too much toward the east, you get the heavy snow that gives a true Alpine slope to the boughs of your evergreens, and traces a skeleton of your elms in white; but you must have plenty of north in your gale if you want those driving nettles of frost that sting the cheeks to a crimson manlier than that of fire. During the great storm of two winters ago, the most robustious periwig-pated fellow of late years, I waded and floundered a couple of miles through the whispering night, and brought home that feeling of expansion we have after being in good company. "Great things doeth He which we cannot comprehend; for he saith to the snow, 'Be thou on the earth.'"

There is excellent snow scenery in Judd's "Margaret," but some one has confiscated my copy of that admirable book, and, perhaps, Homer's picture of a snow-storm is the best yet in its large simplicity: —

> "And as in winter-time, when Jove his cold sharp javelins throws
> Amongst us mortals, and is moved to white the earth with snows,
> The winds asleep, he freely pours till highest prominents,
> Hill-tops, low meadows, and the fields that crown with most contents
> The toils of men, seaports and shores, are hid, and every place,
> But floods, that fair snow's tender flakes, as their own brood, embrace."

Chapman, after all, though he makes very free with him, comes nearer Homer than anybody else. There is nothing in the original of that fair snow's tender flakes, but neither Pope nor Cowper could get out of their heads the Psalmist's tender phrase, "He giveth his snow like wool," for which also Homer affords no hint. Pope talks of "dissolving fleeces," and Cowper of a "fleecy mantle." But David is nobly simple, while Pope is simply nonsensical, and Cowper pretty. If they must have prettiness, Martial would have supplied them with it in his

Densum tacitarum vellus aquarum,

which is too pretty, though I fear it would have pleased Dr. Donne. Eustathius of Thessalonica calls snow ὕδωρ ἐρίωδες, woolly water, which a poor old French poet, Godeau, has amplified into this:

Lorsque la froidure inhumaine
De leur verd ornement depouille les forêts
Sous une neige épaisse il couvre les guérets,
Et la neige a pour eux la chaleur de la laine.

In this, as in Pope's version of the passage in Homer, there is, at least, a sort of suggestion of snow-storm in the blinding drift of words. But, on the whole, if one would know what snow is, I should advise him not to hunt up what the poets have said about it, but to look at the sweet miracle itself.

The preludings of Winter are as beautiful as those of Spring. In a gray December day, when, as the farmers say, it is too cold to snow, his numbed fingers will let fall doubtfully a few star-shaped flakes, the snow-drops and anemones that

harbinger his more assured reign. Now, and now only, may be seen, heaped on the horizon's eastern edge, those "blue clouds" from forth which Shakespeare says that Mars "doth pluck the masoned turrets." Sometimes also, when the sun is low, you will see a single cloud trailing a flurry of snow along the southern hills in a wavering fringe of purple. And when at last the real snow-storm comes, it leaves the earth with a virginal look on it that no other of the seasons can rival, — compared with which, indeed, they seem soiled and vulgar.

And what is there in nature so beautiful as the next morning after such confusion of the elements? Night has no silence like this of busy day. All the batteries of noise are spiked. We see the movement of life as a deaf man sees it, a mere wraith of the clamorous existence that inflicts itself on our ears when the ground is bare. The earth is clothed in innocence as a garment. Every wound of the landscape is healed; whatever was stiff has been sweetly rounded as the breasts of Aphrodite; what was unsightly has been covered gently with a soft splendor, as if, Cowley would have said, Nature had cleverly let fall her handkerchief to hide it. If the Virgin (*Notre Dame de la Neige*) were to come back, here is an earth that would not bruise her foot nor stain it. It is

> "The fanned snow
> That 's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er," —
> (Soffiata e stretta dai venti Schiavi,)
> Winnowed and packed by the Sclavonian winds, —

packed so hard sometimes on hill-slopes that it will

bear your weight. What grace is in all the curves, as if every one of them had been swept by that inspired thumb of Phidias's journeyman!

Poets have fancied the footprints of the wind in those light ripples that sometimes scurry across smooth water with a sudden blur. But on this gleaming hush the aerial deluge has left plain marks of its course; and in gullies through which it rushed torrent-like, the eye finds its bed irregularly scooped like that of a brook in hard beach-sand, or, in more sheltered spots, traced with outlines like those left by the sliding edges of the surf upon the shore. The air, after all, is only an infinitely thinner kind of water, such as I suppose we shall have to drink when the state does her whole duty as a moral reformer. Nor is the wind the only thing whose trail you will notice on this sensitive surface. You will find that you have more neighbors and night visitors than you dreamed of. Here is the dainty footprint of a cat; here a dog has looked in on you like an amateur watchman to see if all is right, slumping clumsily about in the mealy treachery. And look! before you were up in the morning, though you were a punctual courtier at the sun's levee, here has been a squirrel zigzagging to and fro like a hound gathering the scent, and some tiny bird searching for unimaginable food, — perhaps for the tinier creature, whatever it is, that drew this slender continuous trail like those made on the wet beach by light borderers of the sea. The earliest autographs were as frail as these. Poseidon traced his lines, or giant birds made their

mark, on preadamite sea-margins; and the thunder-gust left the tear-stains of its sudden passion there; nay, we have the signatures of delicatest fern-leaves on the soft ooze of æons that dozed away their dreamless leisure before consciousness came upon the earth with man. Some whim of nature locked them fast in stone for us afterthoughts of creation. Which of us shall leave a footprint as imperishable as that of the ornithorhyncus, or much more so than that of these Bedouins of the snow-desert? Perhaps it was only because the ripple and the rain-drop and the bird were not thinking of themselves, that they had such luck. The chances of immortality depend very much on that. How often have we not seen poor mortals, dupes of a season's notoriety, carving their names on seeming-solid rock of merest beach-sand, whose feeble hold on memory shall be washed away by the next wave of fickle opinion! Well, well, honest Jacques, there are better things to be found in the snow than sermons.

The snow that falls damp comes commonly in larger flakes from windless skies, and is the prettiest of all to watch from under cover. This is the kind Homer had in mind; and Dante, who had never read him, compares the *dilatate falde*, the flaring flakes, of his fiery rain, to those of snow among the mountains without wind. This sort of snowfall has no fight in it, and does not challenge you to a wrestle like that which drives well from the northward, with all moisture thoroughly winnowed out of it by the frosty wind. Burns, who

was more out of doors than most poets, and whose barefoot Muse got the color in her cheeks by vigorous exercise in all weathers, was thinking of this drier deluge, when he speaks of the "whirling drift," and tells how

> "Chanticleer
> Shook off the powthery snaw."

But the damper and more deliberate falls have a choice knack at draping the trees; and about eaves or stone-walls, wherever, indeed, the evaporation is rapid, and it finds a chance to cling, it will build itself out in curves of wonderful beauty. I have seen one of these dumb waves, thus caught in the act of breaking, curl four feet beyond the edge of my roof and hang there for days, as if Nature were too well pleased with her work to let it crumble from its exquisite pause. After such a storm, if you are lucky enough to have even a sluggish ditch for a neighbor, be sure to pay it a visit. You will find its banks corniced with what seems precipitated light, and the dark current down below gleams as if with an inward lustre. Dull of motion as it is, you never saw water that seemed alive before. It has a brightness, like that of the eyes of some smaller animals, which gives assurance of life, but of a life foreign and unintelligible.

A damp snow-storm often turns to rain, and, in our freakish climate, the wind will whisk sometimes into the northwest so suddenly as to plate all the trees with crystal before it has swept the sky clear of its last cobweb of cloud. Ambrose Philips, in a poetical epistle from Copenhagen to the Earl

of Dorset, describes this strange confectionery of Nature, — for such, I am half ashamed to say, it always seems to me, recalling the "glorified sugar-candy" of Lamb's first night at the theatre. It has an artificial air, altogether beneath the grand artist of the atmosphere, and besides does too much mischief to the trees for a philodendrist to take unmixed pleasure in it. Perhaps it deserves a poet like Philips, who really loved Nature and yet liked her to be mighty fine, as Pepys would say, with a heightening of powder and rouge: —

"And yet but lately have I seen e'en here
The winter in a lovely dress appear.
Ere yet the clouds let fall the treasured snow,
Or winds begun through hazy skies to blow,
At evening a keen eastern breeze arose,
And the descending rain unsullied froze.
Soon as the silent shades of night withdrew,
The ruddy noon disclosed at once to view
The face of Nature in a rich disguise,
And brightened every object to my eyes;
For every shrub, and every blade of grass,
And every pointed thorn, seemed wrought in glass;
In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorns show,
And through the ice the crimson berries glow;
The thick-sprung reeds, which watery marshes yield,
Seem polished lances in a hostile field;
The stag in limpid currents with surprise
Sees crystal branches on his forehead rise;
The spreading oak, the beech, the towering pine,
Glazed over in the freezing ether shine;
The frighted birds the rattling branches shun,
Which wave and glitter in the distant sun,
When, if a sudden gust of wind arise,
The brittle forest into atoms flies,
The crackling wood beneath the tempest bends
And in a spangled shower the prospect ends."

It is not uninstructive to see how tolerable Ambrose is, so long as he sticks manfully to what he really saw. The moment he undertakes to improve on Nature he sinks into the mere court poet, and we surrender him to the jealousy of Pope without a sigh. His "rattling branches," "crackling wood," and crimson berries glowing through the ice are good, as truth always is after a fashion; but what shall we say of that dreadful stag which, there is little doubt, he valued above all the rest, because it was purely his own?

The damper snow tempts the amateur architect and sculptor. His Pentelicus has been brought to his very door, and if there are boys to be had (whose company beats all other recipes for prolonging life) a middle-aged Master of the Works will knock the years off his account and make the family Bible seem a dealer in foolish fables, by a few hours given heartily to this business. First comes the Sisyphean toil of rolling the clammy balls till they refuse to budge farther. Then, if you would play the statuary, they are piled one upon the other to the proper height; or if your aim be masonry, whether of house or fort, they must be squared and beaten solid with the shovel. The material is capable of very pretty effects, and your young companions meanwhile are unconsciously learning lessons in æsthetics. From the feeling of satisfaction with which one squats on the damp floor of his extemporized dwelling, I have been led to think that the backwoodsman must get a sweeter savor of self-sufficingness from the house his own hands

have built than Bramante or Sansovino could ever give. Perhaps the fort is the best thing, for it calls out more masculine qualities and adds the cheer of battle with that dumb artillery which gives pain enough to test pluck without risk of serious hurt. Already, as I write, it is twenty-odd years ago. The balls fly thick and fast. The uncle defends the waist-high ramparts against a storm of nephews, his breast plastered with decorations like another Radetsky's. How well I recall the indomitable good-humor under fire of him who fell in the front at Ball's Bluff, the silent pertinacity of the gentle scholar who got his last hurt at Fair Oaks, the ardor in the charge of the gallant gentleman who, with the death-wound in his side, headed his brigade at Cedar Creek! How it all comes back, and they never come! I cannot again be the Vauban of fortresses in the innocent snow, but I shall never see children moulding their clumsy giants in it without longing to help. It was a pretty fancy of the young Vermont sculptor to make his first essay in this evanescent material. Was it a figure of Youth, I wonder? Would it not be well if all artists could begin in stuff as perishable, to melt away when the sun of prosperity began to shine, and leave nothing behind but the gain of practised hands? It is pleasant to fancy that Shakespeare served his apprenticeship at this trade, and owed to it that most pathetic of despairing wishes, —

> "O, that I were a mockery-king of snow,
> Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
> To melt myself away in water-drops!"

I have spoken of the exquisite curves of snow surfaces. Not less rare are the tints of which they are capable, — the faint blue of the hollows, for the shadows in snow are always blue, and the tender rose of higher points, as you stand with your back to the setting sun and look upward across the soft rondure of a hillside. I have seen within a mile of home effects of color as lovely as any iridescence of the Silberhorn after sundown. Charles II., who never said a foolish thing, gave the English climate the highest praise when he said that it allowed you more hours out of doors than any other, and I think our winter may fairly make the same boast as compared with the rest of the year. Its still mornings, with the thermometer near zero, put a premium on walking. There is more sentiment in turf, perhaps, and it is more elastic under the foot; its silence, too, is wellnigh as congenial with meditation as that of fallen pine-tassel; but for exhilaration there is nothing like a stiff snow-crust that creaks like a cricket at every step, and communicates its own sparkle to the senses. The air you drink is *frappé*, all its grosser particles precipitated, and the dregs of your blood with them. A purer current mounts to the brain, courses sparkling through it, and rinses it thoroughly of all dejected stuff. There is nothing left to breed an exhalation of ill-humor or despondency. They say that this rarefied atmosphere has lessened the capacity of our lungs. Be it so. Quart-pots are for muddier liquor than nectar. To me, the city in winter is infinitely dreary, — the sharp street-

corners have such a chill in them, and the snow so soon loses its maidenhood to become a mere drab, — "doing shameful things," as Steele says of politicians, "without being ashamed." I pine for the Quaker purity of my country landscape. I am speaking, of course, of those winters that are not niggardly of snow, as ours too often are, giving us a gravelly dust instead. Nothing can be unsightlier than those piebald fields where the coarse brown hide of Earth shows through the holes of her ragged ermine. But even when there is abundance of snow, I find as I grow older that there are not so many good crusts as there used to be. When I first observed this, I rashly set it to the account of that general degeneracy in nature (keeping pace with the same melancholy phenomenon in man) which forces itself upon the attention and into the philosophy of middle life. But happening once to be weighed, it occurred to me that an arch which would bear fifty pounds could hardly be blamed for giving way under more than three times the weight. I have sometimes thought that if theologians would remember this in their arguments, and consider that the man may slump through, with no fault of his own, where the boy would have skimmed the surface in safety, it would be better for all parties. However, when you *do* get a crust that will bear, and know any brooklet that runs down a hillside, be sure to go and take a look at him, especially if your crust is due, as it commonly is, to a cold snap following eagerly on a thaw. You will never find him so

cheerful. As he shrank away after the last thaw, he built for himself the most exquisite caverns of ice to run through, if not "measureless to man" like those of Alph, the sacred river, yet perhaps more pleasing for their narrowness than those for their grandeur. What a cunning silversmith is Frost! The rarest workmanship of Delhi or Genoa copies him but clumsily, as if the fingers of all other artists were thumbs. Fernwork and lacework and filigree in endless variety, and under it all the water tinkles like a distant guitar, or drums like a tambourine, or gurgles like the Tokay of an anchorite's dream. Beyond doubt there is a fairy procession marching along those frail arcades and translucent corridors.

> "Their oaten pipes blow wondrous shrill,
> The hemlocks small blow clear."

And hark! is that the ringing of Titania's bridle, or the bells of the wee, wee hawk that sits on Oberon's wrist? This wonder of Frost's handiwork may be had every winter, but he can do better than this, though I have seen it but once in my life. There had been a thaw without wind or rain, making the air fat with gray vapor. Towards sundown came that chill, the avant-courier of a northwesterly gale. Then, though there was no perceptible current in the atmosphere, the fog began to attach itself in frosty roots and filaments to the southern side of every twig and grass-stem. The very posts had poems traced upon them by this dumb minstrel. Wherever the moist seeds found lodgement grew an inch-deep moss fine as cobweb, a slender

coral-reef, argentine, delicate, as of some silent sea in the moon, such as Agassiz dredges when he dreams. The frost, too, can wield a delicate graver, and in fancy leaves Piranesi far behind. He covers your window-pane with Alpine etchings, as if in memory of that sanctuary where he finds shelter even in midsummer.

Now look down from your hillside across the valley. The trees are leafless, but this is the season to study their anatomy, and did you ever notice before how much color there is in the twigs of many of them? And the smoke from those chimneys is so blue it seems like a feeder of the sky into which it flows. Winter refines it and gives it agreeable associations. In summer it suggests cookery or the drudgery of steam-engines, but now your fancy (if it can forget for a moment the dreary usurpation of stoves) traces it down to the fireside and the brightened faces of children. Thoreau is the only poet who has fitly sung it. The wood-cutter rises before day and

> "First in the dusky dawn he sends abroad
> His early scout, his emissary, smoke,
> The earliest, latest pilgrim from his roof,
> To feel the frosty air; . . .
> And, while he crouches still beside the hearth,
> Nor musters courage to unbar the door,
> It has gone down the glen with the light wind
> And o'er the plain unfurled its venturous wreath,
> Draped the tree-tops, loitered upon the hill,
> And warmed the pinions of the early bird;
> And now, perchance, high in the crispy air,
> Has caught sight of the day o'er the earth's edge,
> And greets its master's eye at his low door
> As some refulgent cloud in the upper sky."

Here is very bad verse and very good imagination. He had been reading Wordsworth, or he would not have made *tree-tops* an iambus. In reading it over again I am bound to say that I have never seen smoke that became a refulgent cloud in the upper sky anywhere but in London. In the *Moretum* of Virgil (or, if not his, better than most of his) is a pretty picture of a peasant kindling his winter-morning fire. He rises before dawn,

> Sollicitaque manu tenebras explorat inertes
> Vestigatque focum læsus quem denique sensit.
> Parvulus exusto remanebat stipite fumus,
> Et cinis obductæ celabat lumina prunæ.
> Admovet his pronam submissa fronte lucernam,
> Et producit acu stupas humore carentes,
> Excitat et crebris languentem flatibus ignem;
> Tandem concepto tenebræ fulgore recedunt,
> Oppositaque manu lumen defendit ab aura.

> With cautious hand he gropes the sluggish dark,
> Tracking the hearth which, scorched, he feels erelong.
> In burnt-out logs a slender smoke remained,
> And raked-up ashes hid the cinders' eyes;
> Stooping, to these the lamp outstretched he nears,
> And, with a needle loosening the dry wick,
> With frequent breath excites the languid flame.
> Before the gathering glow the shades recede,
> And his bent hand the new-caught light defends.

Ovid heightens the picture by a single touch: —

> Ipse genu posito flammas exsuscitat aura.

> Kneeling, his breath calls back to life the flames.

If you walk down now into the woods, you may find a robin or a bluebird among the red-cedars, or a nuthatch scaling deviously the trunk of some hardwood tree with an eye as keen as that of a

French soldier foraging for the *pot-au-feu* of his mess. Perhaps a blue-jay shrills *cah cah* in his corvine trebles, or a chickadee

> "Shows feats of his gymnastic play,
> Head downward, clinging to the spray."

But both him and the snow-bird I love better to see, tiny fluffs of feathered life, as they scurry about in a driving mist of snow, than in this serene air.

Coleridge has put into verse one of the most beautiful phenomena of a winter walk: —

> "The woodman winding westward up the glen
> At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
> The viewless snow-mist weaves a glistening haze,
> Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
> An image with a halo round its head."

But this aureole is not peculiar to winter. I have noticed it often in a summer morning, when the grass was heavy with dew, and even later in the day, when the dewless grass was still fresh enough to have a gleam of its own.

For my own part I prefer a winter walk that takes in the nightfall and the intense silence that ere long follows it. The evening lamps look yellower by contrast with the snow, and give the windows that hearty look of which our secretive fires have almost robbed them. The stars seem

> "To hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
> Among the branches of the leafless trees,"

or, if you are on a hill-top (whence it is sweet to watch the home-lights gleam out one by one), they look nearer than in summer, and appear to take a conscious part in the cold. Especially in one of those

stand-stills of the air that forebode a change of weather, the sky is dusted with motes of fire of which the summer-watcher never dreamed. Winter, too, is, on the whole, the triumphant season of the moon, a moon devoid of sentiment, if you choose, but with the refreshment of a purer intellectual light, — the cooler orb of middle life. Who ever saw anything to match that gleam, rather divined than seen, which runs before her over the snow, a breath of light, as she rises on the infinite silence of winter night? High in the heavens, also she seems to bring out some intenser property of cold with her chilly polish. The poets have instinctively noted this. When Goody Blake imprecates a curse of perpetual chill upon Harry Gill, she has

> "The cold, cold moon above her head";

and Coleridge speaks of

> "The silent icicles,
> Quietly gleaming to the quiet moon."

As you walk homeward, — for it is time that we should end our ramble, — you may perchance hear the most impressive sound in nature, unless it be the fall of a tree in the forest during the hush of summer noon. It is the stifled shriek of the lake yonder as the frost throttles it. Wordsworth has described it (too much, I fear, in the style of Dr. Armstrong): —

> "And, interrupting oft that eager game,
> From under Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice,
> The pent-up air, struggling to free itself,
> Gave out to meadow-grounds and hills a loud

> **Protracted yelling, like the noise of wolves**
> **Howling in troops along the Bothnic main."**

Thoreau (unless the English lakes have a different dialect from ours) calls it admirably well a "whoop." But it is a noise like none other, as if Demogorgon were moaning inarticulately from under the earth. Let us get within doors, lest we hear it again, for there is something bodeful and uncanny in it.

CHAUCER[1]

1870

WILL it *do* to say anything more about Chaucer? Can any one hope to say anything, not new, but even fresh, on a topic so well worn? It may well be doubted; and yet one is always the better for a walk in the morning air, — a medicine which may be taken over and over again without any sense of sameness, or any failure of its invigorating quality. There is a pervading wholesomeness in the writings of this man, — a vernal property that soothes and refreshes in a way of which no other has ever found the secret. I repeat to myself a thousand times, —

> "Whan that Aprilë with his showrës sotë
> The droughte of March hath percëd to the rotë,
> And bathëd every veine in swich licour
> Of which vertue engendered is the flour, —

[1] *Publications of the Chaucer Society.* London. 1869–70.

Étude sur G. Chaucer considéré comme imitateur des Trouvères. Par E. G. Sandras, Agrégé de l'Université. Paris: Auguste Dusand. 1859. 8vo. pp. 298.

Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury-Geschichten, uebersetzt in den Versmassen der Urschrift, und durch Einleitung und Anmerkungen erläutert. Von Wilhelm Hertzberg. Hildburghausen. 1866. 12mo. pp. 674.

Chaucer in Seinen Beziehungen zur italienischen Literatur. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doctorwürde. Von Alfons Kissner. Bonn. 1867. 8vo. pp. 81.

> When Zephyrus eek with his swetē breth
> Enspirēd hath in every holt and heth
> The tender croppēs, and the yongē sonne
> Hath in the ram his halfē cors yronne,
> And smalē foulēs maken melodiē," —

and still at the thousandth time a breath of uncontaminate springtide seems to lift the hair upon my forehead. If here be not the *largior ether*, the serene and motionless atmosphere of classical antiquity, we find at least the *seclusum nemus*, the *domos placidas*, and the *oubliance*, as Froissart so sweetly calls it, that persuade us we are in an Elysium none the less sweet that it appeals to our more purely human, one might almost say domestic, sympathies. We may say of Chaucer's muse, as Overbury of his milkmaid, "her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of *June* like a new-made haycock." The most hardened *roué* of literature can scarce confront these simple and winning graces without feeling somewhat of the unworn sentiment of his youth revive in him. Modern imaginative literature has become so self-conscious, and therefore so melancholy, that Art, which should be "the world's sweet inn," whither we repair for refreshment and repose, has become rather a watering-place, where one's own private touch of the liver-complaint is exasperated by the affluence of other sufferers whose talk is a narrative of morbid symptoms. Poets have forgotten that the first lesson of literature, no less than of life, is the learning how to burn your own smoke; that the way to be original is to be healthy; that the fresh color, so delightful in all good writing, is won by escaping

from the fixed air of self into the brisk atmosphere of universal sentiments; and that to make the common marvellous, as if it were a revelation, is the test of genius. It is good to retreat now and then beyond earshot of the introspective confidences of modern literature, and to lose ourselves in the gracious worldliness of Chaucer. Here was a healthy and hearty man, so genuine that he need not ask whether he were genuine or no, so sincere as quite to forget his own sincerity, so truly pious that he could be happy in the best world that God chose to make, so humane that he loved even the foibles of his kind. Here was a truly epic poet, without knowing it, who did not waste time in considering whether his age were good or bad, but quietly taking it for granted as the best that ever was or could be for *him*, has left us such a picture of contemporary life as no man ever painted. "A perpetual fountain of good-sense," Dryden calls him, yes, and of good-humor, too, and wholesome thought. He was one of those rare authors whom, if we had met him under a porch in a shower, we should have preferred to the rain. He could be happy with a crust and spring-water, and could see the shadow of his benign face in a flagon of Gascon wine without fancying Death sitting opposite to cry *Supernaculum!* when he had drained it. He could look to God without abjectness, and on man without contempt. The pupil of manifold experience, — scholar, courtier, soldier, ambassador, who had known poverty as a housemate and been the companion of princes, — his was one of those happy

temperaments that could equally enjoy both halves of culture, — the world of books and the world of men.

> "Unto this day it doth mine hertë boote,
> That I have had my world as in my time!"

The portrait of Chaucer, which we owe to the loving regret of his disciple Occleve, confirms the judgment of him which we make from his works. It is, I think, more engaging than that of any other poet. The downcast eyes, half sly, half meditative, the sensuous mouth, the broad brow, drooping with weight of thought, and yet with an inexpugnable youth shining out of it as from the morning forehead of a boy, are all noticeable, and not less so their harmony of placid tenderness. We are struck, too, with the smoothness of the face as of one who thought easily, whose phrase flowed naturally, and who had never puckered his brow over an unmanageable verse.

Nothing has been added to our knowledge of Chaucer's life since Sir Harris Nicholas, with the help of original records, weeded away the fictions by which the few facts were choked and overshadowed. We might be sorry that no confirmation has been found for the story, fathered on a certain phantasmal Mr. Buckley, that Chaucer was "fined two shillings for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street," if it were only for the alliteration; but we refuse to give up the meeting with Petrarch. All the probabilities are in its favor. That Chaucer, being at Milan, should not have found occasion to ride across so far as Padua, for the sake of seeing

the most famous literary man of the day, is incredible. If Froissart could journey on horseback through Scotland and Wales, surely Chaucer, whose curiosity was as lively as his, might have ventured what would have been a mere pleasure-trip in comparison. I cannot easily bring myself to believe that he is not giving some touches of his own character in that of the Clerk of Oxford: —

> "For him was liefer have at his bed's head
> A twenty bookës clothed in black and red
> Of Aristotle and his philosophië
> Than robës rich, or fiddle or psaltrië:
> But although that he were a philosòpher
> Yet had he but a little gold in coffer:
> Of study took he mostë care and heed;
> Not one word spake he morë than was need:
> All that he spake it was of high prudèncë,
> And short and quick, and full of great sentencë;
> Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,
> And gladly would he learn and gladly teach."

That, himself as plump as Horace, he should have described the Clerk as being lean, will be no objection to those who remember how carefully Chaucer effaces his own personality in his great poem. Our chief debt to Sir Harris Nicholas is for having disproved the story that Chaucer, imprisoned for complicity in the insurrection of John of Northampton, had set himself free by betraying his accomplices. That a poet, one of whose leading qualities is his good sense and moderation, and who should seem to have practised his own rule, to

> "Fly from the press and dwell with soothfastness;
> Sufficë thee thy good though it be small,"

should have been concerned in any such political

excesses, was improbable enough; but that he should add to this the baseness of broken faith was incredible except to such as in a doubtful story

"Demen gladly to the badder end."

Sir Harris Nicholas has proved by the records that the fabric is baseless, and we may now read the poet's fine verse,

"Truth is the highest thing a man may keep,"

without a pang. We are thankful that Chaucer's shoulders are finally discharged of that weary load, "The Testament of Love."[1] The later biographers seem inclined to make Chaucer a younger man at his death in 1400 than has hitherto been supposed. Herr Hertzberg even puts his birth so late as 1340. But, till more conclusive evidence is produced, we shall adhere to the received dates as on the whole more consonant with the probabilities of the case. The monument is clearly right as to the year of his death, and the chances are at least even that both this and the date of birth were copied from an older inscription. The only counter-argument that has much force is the manifestly unfinished condition of the "Canterbury Tales." That a man of seventy odd could have put such a spirit of youth into those matchless prologues will

[1] Tyrwhitt doubted the authenticity of *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*. To these Mr. Bradshaw (and there can be no higher authority) would add *The Court of Love*, the *Dream*, the *Praise of Woman*, the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and several of the shorter poems. To these doubtful productions there is strong ground, both moral and æsthetic, for adding the *Parson's Tale*.

not, however, surprise those who remember Dryden's second spring-time. It is plain that the notion of giving unity to a number of disconnected stories by the device which Chaucer adopted was an afterthought. These stories had been written, and some of them even published, at periods far asunder, and without any reference to connection among themselves. The prologues, and those parts which internal evidence justifies us in taking them to have been written after the thread of plan to string them on was conceived, are in every way more mature, — in knowledge of the world, in easy mastery of verse and language, and in the overpoise of sentiment by judgment. They may with as much probability be referred to a green old age as to the middle-life of a man who, upon any theory of the dates, was certainly slow in ripening.

The formation of a Chaucer Society, now four centuries and a half after the poet's death, gives suitable occasion for taking a new observation of him, as of a fixed star, not only in our own, but in the European literary heavens, "whose worth 's unknown although his height be taken." The admirable work now doing by this Society, whose establishment was mainly due to the pious zeal of Mr. Furnivall, deserves recognition from all who know how to value the too rare union of accurate scholarship with minute exactness in reproducing the text. The six-text edition of the "Canterbury Tales," giving what is practically equivalent to six manuscript copies, is particularly deserving of grat-

itude from this side the water, as it for the first time affords to Americans the opportunity of independent critical study and comparison. This beautiful work is fittingly inscribed to our countryman, Professor Child, of Harvard, a lover of Chaucer, "so proved by his wordës and his werke," who has done more for the great poet's memory than any man since Tyrwhitt. We earnestly hope that the Society may find enough support to print all the remaining manuscript texts of importance, for there can hardly be any one of them that may not help us to a valuable hint. The works of Mr. Sandras and Herr Hertzberg show that this is a matter of interest not merely or even primarily to English scholars. The introduction to the latter is one of the best essays on Chaucer yet written, while the former, which is an investigation of the French and Italian sources of the poet, supplies us with much that is new and worth having as respects his training, and the obstacles of fashion and taste through which he had to force his way before he could find free play for his native genius, or even so much as arrive at a consciousness thereof. M. Sandras is in every way a worthy pupil of the accomplished M. Victor Leclerc, and, though he lays perhaps a little too much stress on the indebtedness of Chaucer in particulars, shows a singularly intelligent and clear-sighted eye for the general grounds of his claim to greatness and originality. It is these grounds which I propose chiefly to examine here.

The first question we put to any poet, nay, to

any so-called national literature, is that which Farinata addressed to Dante, *Chi fur li maggior tui?* Here is no question of plagiarism, for poems are not made of words and thoughts and images, but of that something in the poet himself which can compel them to obey him and move to the rhythm of his nature. Thus it is that the new poet, however late he come, can never be forestalled, and the ship-builder who built the pinnace of Columbus has as much claim to the discovery of America as he who suggests a thought by which some other man opens new worlds to us has to a share in that achievement by him unconceived and inconceivable. Chaucer undoubtedly began as an imitator, perhaps as mere translator, serving the needful apprenticeship in the use of his tools. Children learn to speak by watching the lips and catching the words of those who know how already, and poets learn in the same way from their elders. They import their raw material from any and everywhere, and the question at last comes down to this, — whether an author have original force enough to assimilate all he has acquired, or that be so overmastering as to assimilate *him*. If the poet turn out the stronger, we allow him to help himself from other people with wonderful equanimity. Should a man discover the art of transmuting metals and present us with a lump of gold as large as an ostrich-egg, would it be in human nature to inquire too nicely whether he had stolen the lead ?

Nothing is more certain than that great poets are not sudden prodigies, but slow results. As an

oak profits by the foregone lives of immemorial vegetable races that have worked-over the juices of earth and air into organic life out of whose dissolution a soil might gather fit to maintain that nobler birth of nature, so we may be sure that the genius of every remembered poet drew the forces that built it up out of the decay of a long succession of forgotten ones. Nay, in proportion as the genius is vigorous and original will its indebtedness be greater, will its roots strike deeper into the past and grope in remoter fields for the virtue that must sustain it. Indeed, if the works of the great poets teach anything, it is to hold mere invention somewhat cheap. It is not the finding of a thing, but the making something out of it after it is found, that is of consequence. Accordingly, Chaucer, like Shakespeare, invented almost nothing. Wherever he found anything directed to Geoffrey Chaucer, he took it and made the most of it. It was not the subject treated, but himself, that was the new thing. *Cela m'appartient de droit*, Molière is reported to have said when accused of plagiarism. Chaucer pays that "usurious interest which genius," as Coleridge says, "always pays in borrowing." The characteristic touch is his own. In the famous passage about the caged bird, copied from the "Romaunt of the Rose," the "gon eten wormes" was added by him. We must let him, if he will, eat the heart out of the literature that had preceded him, as we sacrifice the mulberry-leaves to the silkworm, because he knows how to convert them into something richer and more last-

ing. The question of originality is not one of form, but of substance, not of cleverness, but of imaginative power. Given your material, in other words the life in which you live, how much can you see in it? For on that depends how much you can make of it. Is it merely an arrangement of man's contrivance, a patchwork of expediencies for temporary comfort and convenience, good enough if it last your time, or is it so much of the surface of that ever-flowing deity which we call Time, wherein we catch such fleeting reflection as is possible for us, of our relation to perdurable things? This is what makes the difference between Æschylus and Euripides, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Goethe and Heine, between literature and rhetoric. Something of this depth of insight, if not in the fullest, yet in no inconsiderable measure, characterizes Chaucer. We must not let his playfulness, his delight in the world as mere spectacle, mislead us into thinking that he was incapable of serious purpose or insensible to the deeper meanings of life.

There are four principal sources from which Chaucer may be presumed to have drawn for poetical suggestion or literary culture, — the Latins, the Troubadours, the Trouvères, and the Italians. It is only the two latter who can fairly claim any immediate influence in the direction of his thought or the formation of his style. The only Latin poet who can be supposed to have influenced the spirit of mediæval literature is Ovid. In his sentimentality, his love of the marvellous and the pictur-

esque, he is its natural precursor. The analogy between his Fasti and the versified legends of saints is more than a fanciful one. He was certainly popular with the poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Virgil had wellnigh become mythical. The chief merit of the Provençal poets is in having been the first to demonstrate that it was possible to write with elegance in a modern dialect, and their interest for us is mainly as forerunners, as indications of tendency. Their literature is prophecy, not fulfilment. Its formal sentiment culminated in Laura, its ideal aspiration in Beatrice. Shakespeare's hundred and sixth sonnet, if, for the imaginary mistress to whom it was addressed, we substitute the muse of a truer conception and more perfected utterance, represents exactly the feeling with which we read Provençal poetry: —

> "When in the chronicle of wasted Time
> I see descriptions of the fairest wights
> And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
> In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
> . . . . . .
> I see their antique pen would have expressed
> Even such a beauty as you master now;
> So all their praises are but prophecies
> Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
> And, for they looked but with divining eyes,
> They had not skill enough your worth to sing."

It is astonishing how little of the real life of the time we learn from the Troubadours except by way of inference and deduction. Their poetry is purely lyric in its most narrow sense, that is, the expression of personal and momentary moods. To the

fancy of critics who take their cue from tradition, Provence is a morning sky of early summer, out of which innumerable larks rain a faint melody (the sweeter because rather half divined than heard too distinctly) over an earth where the dew never dries and the flowers never fade. But when we open Raynouard it is like opening the door of an aviary. We are deafened and confused by a hundred minstrels singing the same song at once, and more than suspect that the flowers they welcome are made of French cambric spangled with dew-drops of prevaricating glass. Bernard de Ventadour and Bertrand de Born are wellnigh the only ones among them in whom we find an original type. Yet the Troubadours undoubtedly led the way to refinement of conception and perfection of form. They were the conduit through which the failing stream of Roman literary tradition flowed into the new channel which mediæval culture was slowly shaping for itself. Without them we could not understand Petrarca, who carried the manufacture of artificial bloom and fictitious dew-drop to a point of excellence where artifice, if ever, may claim the praise of art. Without them we could not understand Dante, in whom their sentiment for woman was idealized by a passionate intellect and a profound nature, till Beatrice becomes a half-human, half-divine abstraction, a woman still to memory and devotion, a disembodied symbol to the ecstasy of thought. The Provençal love-poetry was as abstracted from all sensuality as that of Petrarca, but it stops short of that larger and more gracious

style of treatment which has secured him a place in all gentle hearts and refined imaginations forever. In it also woman leads her servants upward, but it is along the easy slopes of conventional sentiment, and no Troubadour so much as dreamed of that loftier region, native to Dante, where *the* woman is subtilized into *das Ewig-Weibliche*, type of man's finer conscience and nobler aspiration made sensible to him only through her.

On the whole, it would be hard to find anything more tediously artificial than the Provençal literature, except the reproduction of it by the Minnesingers. The *Tedeschi lurchi* certainly *did* contrive to make something heavy as dough out of what was at least light, if not very satisfying, in the canorous dialect of Southern Gaul. But its doom was inevitably predicted in its nature and position, nay, in its very name. It was, and it continues to be, a strictly *provincial* literature, imprisoned within extremely narrow intellectual and even geographical limits. It is not race or language that can inflict this leprous isolation, but some defect of sympathy with the simpler and more universal relations of human nature. You cannot shut up Burns in a dialect bristling with archaisms, nor prevent Béranger from setting all pulses a-dance in the least rhythmic and imaginative of modern tongues. The healthy temperament of Chaucer, with its breadth of interest in all ranks and phases of social life, could have found little that was sympathetic in the evaporated sentiment and rhetorical punctilios of a school of poets which,

with rare exceptions, began and ended in courtly dilettantism.

The refined formality with which the literary product of Provençe is for the most part stamped, as with a trademark, was doubtless the legacy of Gallo-Roman culture, itself at best derivative and superficial. I think, indeed, that it may well be doubted whether Roman literature, always a half-hardy exotic, could ripen the seeds of living reproduction. The Roman genius was eminently practical, and far more apt for the triumphs of politics and jurisprudence than of art. Supreme elegance it could and did arrive at in Virgil, but, if I may trust my own judgment, it produced but one original poet, and that was Horace, who has ever since continued the favorite of men of the world, an apostle to the Gentiles of the mild cynicism of middle-age and an after-dinner philosophy. Though in no sense national, he was, more truly than any has ever been since, till the same combination of circumstances produced Béranger, an urbane or city poet. Rome, with her motley life, her formal religion, her easy morals, her spectacles, her luxury, her suburban country-life, was his muse. The situation was new, and found a singer who had wit enough to turn it to account. There are a half-dozen pieces of Catullus unsurpassed (unless their Greek originals should turn up) for lyric grace and fanciful tenderness. The sparrow of Lesbia still pecks the rosy lips of his mistress, immortal as the eagle of Pindar. One profound imagination, one man, who with a more prosperous subject

might have been a great poet, lifted Roman literature above its ordinary level of tasteful commonsense. The invocation of Venus, as the genetic force of nature, by Lucretius, seems to me the one sunburst of purely poetic inspiration which the Latin language can show. But this very force, without which *neque fit lætum neque amabile quicquam*, was wholly wanting in those poets of the post-classic period, through whom the literary influences of the past were transmitted to the romanized provincials. The works of Ausonius interest us as those of our own Dwights and Barlows do. The "Conquest of Canaan" and the "Columbiad" were Connecticut epics no doubt, but still were better than nothing in their day. If not literature, they were at least memories of literature, and such memories are not without effect in reproducing what they regret. The provincial writers of Latin devoted themselves with a dreary assiduity to the imitation of models which they deemed classical, but which were truly so only in the sense that they were the more decorously respectful of the dead form in proportion as the living spirit had more utterly gone out of it. It is, I suspect, to the traditions of this purely rhetorical influence, indirectly exercised, that we are to attribute the rapid passage of the new Provençal poetry from what must have been its original popular character to that highly artificial condition which precedes total extinction. It was the alienation of the written from the spoken language (always, perhaps, more or less malignly operative in giving Roman literature a cold-blooded

turn as compared with Greek), which, ending at length in total divorce, rendered Latin incapable of supplying the wants of new men and new ideas. The same thing, I am strongly inclined to think, was true of the language of the Troubadours. It had become literary, and so far dead. It is true that no language is ever so far gone in consumption as to be beyond the great-poet-cure. Undoubtedly a man of genius can out of his own superabundant vitality compel life into the most decrepit vocabulary. But it is by the infusion of his own blood, as it were, and not without a certain sacrifice of power. No such rescue came for the *langue d'oc*, which, it should seem, had performed its special function in the development of modern literature, and would have perished even without the Albigensian war. The position of the Gallo-Romans of the South, both ethical and geographical, precluded them from producing anything really great or even original in literature, for that must have its root in a national life, and this they never had. After the Burgundian invasion their situation was in many respects analogous to our own after the Revolutionary War. They had been thoroughly romanized in language and culture, but the line of their historic continuity had been broken. The Roman road, which linked them with the only past they knew, had been buried under the great barbarian land-slide. In like manner we, inheriting the language, the social usages, the literary and political traditions of Englishmen, were suddenly cut adrift from our historical anchorage. Very soon there

arose a demand for a native literature, nay, it was even proposed that, as a first step towards it, we should adopt a lingo of our own to be called the Columbian or Hesperian. This, to be sure, was never accomplished, though our English cousins seem to hint sometimes that we have made very fair advances towards it; but if it could have been, our position would have been precisely that of the Provençals when they began to have a literature of their own. They had formed a language which, while it completed their orphanage from their imperial mother, continually recalled her, and kept alive their pride of lineage. Such reminiscences as they still retained of Latin culture were pedantic and rhetorical,[1] and it was only natural that out of these they should have elaborated a code of poetical jurisprudence with titles and subtitles applicable to every form of verse and tyrannous over every mode of sentiment. The result could not fail to be artificial and wearisome, except where some man with a truly lyrical genius could breathe life into the rigid formula and make it pliant to his more passionate feeling. The great service of the Provençals was that they kept in mind the fact that poetry was not merely an amusement, but an art, and long after their literary activity had ceased their influence reacted beneficially upon Europe through their Italian pupils. They are interesting as showing the tendency of the Romanic races to a scientific treatment of what, if it be not spontaneous, becomes a fashion and erelong an imperti-

[1] Fauriel, *Histoire de la Gaule Méridionale*, vol. i. *passim*.

nence. Fauriel has endeavored to prove that they were the first to treat the mediæval heroic legends epically, but the evidence is strongly against him. The testimony of Dante on this point is explicit,[1] and moreover not a single romance of chivalry has come down to us in a dialect of the pure Provençal.

The Trouvères, on the other hand, are apt to have something naive and vigorous about them, something that smacks of race and soil. Their very coarseness is almost better than the Troubadour delicacy, because it was not an affectation. The difference between the two schools is that between a culture pedantically transmitted and one which grows and gathers strength from natural causes. Indeed, it is to the North of France and to the Trouvères that we are to look for the true origins of our modern literature. I do not mean in their epical poetry, though there is something refreshing in the mere fact of their choosing native heroes and legends as the subjects of their song. It was in their *Fabliaux* and *Lais* that, dealing with the realities of the life about them, they became original and delightful in spite of themselves. Their

[1] Allegat ergo pro se lingua *Oil* quod propter sui faciliorem et delectabiliorem vulgaritatem, quicquid redactum sive inventum est ad vulgare prosaicum, suum est; videlicet biblia cum Trojanorum, Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis ambages pulcherrimæ et quamplures aliæ historiæ ac doctrinæ. That Dante by *prosaicum* did not mean prose, but a more inartificial verse, *numeros lege solutos*, is clear. Cf. Wolf, *Ueber die Lais*, pp. 92 *seq.* and notes. It has not, I think, been remarked that Dante borrows his *faciliorem et delectabiliorem* from the *plus diletable et comune* of his master Brunetto Latini.

Chansons de Geste are fine specimens of fighting Christianity, highly inspiring for men like Peire de Bergerac, who sings,

> " Bel m'es can aug lo resso
> Que fai l'ausberes ab l'arso,
> Li bruit e il crit e il masan
> Que il corn e las trombas fan "; [1]

but who after reading them — even the best of them, the Song of Roland — can remember much more than a cloud of battle-dust, through which the paladins loom dimly gigantic, and a strong verse flashes here and there like an angry sword? What are the *Romans d'avantures*, the cycle of Arthur and his knights, but a procession of armor and plumes, mere spectacle, not vision like their Grecian antitype, the Odyssey, whose pictures of life, whether domestic or heroic, are among the abiding consolations of the mind? An element of disproportion, of grotesqueness,[2] earmark of the barbarian, disturbs us, even when it does not disgust, in them all. Except the *Roland*, they all want adequate motive, and even in that we may well suspect a reminiscence of the Iliad. They are not without a kind of dignity, for manliness is always noble, and there are detached scenes that are striking, perhaps all the more so from their rarity, like the combat of Oliver and Fierabras, and the leave-taking of Parise la Duchesse. But in

[1] My ears no sweeter music know
Than hauberk's clank with saddlebow,
The noise, the cries, the tumult blown
From trumpet and from clarion.

[2] Compare Floripar in *Fierabras* with Nausikäa, for example.

point of art they are far below even Firdusi, whose great poem is of precisely the same romantic type. The episode of Sohrab and Rustem as much surpasses the former of the passages just alluded to in largeness and energy of treatment, in the true epical quality, as the lament of Tehmine over her son does the latter of them in refined and natural pathos. In our revolt against pseudo-classicism we must not let our admiration for the vigor and freshness which are the merit of this old poetry tempt us to forget that our direct literary inheritance comes to us from an ancestry who would never have got beyond the Age of Iron but for the models of graceful form and delicate workmanship which they found in the tombs of an earlier race.

I recall but one passage (from *Jourdain de Blaivies*) which in its simple movement of the heart can in any way be compared with Chaucer. I translate it freely, merely changing the original assonance into rhyme. Eremborc, to save the son of her liege-lord, has passed off her own child for his, only stipulating that he shall pass the night before his death with her in the prison where she is confined by the usurper Fromond. The time is just as the dreaded dawn begins to break.

"'Garnier, fair son,' the noble lady said,
'To save thy father's life must thou be dead;
And mine, alas, must be with sorrow spent,
Since thou must die, albeit so innocent!
Evening thou shalt not see that see'st the morn!
Woe worth the hour that I beheld thee born,
Whom nine long months within my side I bore!
Was never babe so much desired before.

Now summer will the pleasant days recall
When I shall take my stand upon the wall
And see the fair young gentlemen thy peers
That come and go, and, as beseems their years
Run at the quintain, strive to pierce the shield,
And in the tourney keep their sell or yield;
Then must my heart be tearswoln for thy sake
That 't will be marvel if it do not break.'
At morning, when the day began to peer,
Matins rang out from minsters far and near,
And the clerks sang full well with voices high.
'God,' said the dame, 'thou glorious in the sky,
These lingering nights were wont to tire me so!
And this, alas, how swift it hastes to go!
These clerks and cloistered folk, alas, in spite
So early sing to cheat me of my night!' "

The great advantages which the *langue d'oil* had over its sister dialect of the South of France were its wider distribution, and its representing the national and unitary tendencies of the people as opposed to those of provincial isolation. But the Trouvères had also this superiority, that they gave a voice to real and not merely conventional emotions. In comparison with the Troubadours their sympathies were more human, and their expression more popular. While the tiresome ingenuity of the latter busied itself chiefly in the filigree of wiredrawn sentiment and supersubtilized conceit, the former took their subjects from the street and the market as well as from the château. In the one case language had become a mere material for clever elaboration; in the other, as always in live literature, it was a soil from which the roots of thought and feeling unconsciously drew the coloring of vivid expression. The writers of French,

by the greater pliancy of their dialect and the simpler forms of their verse, had acquired an ease which was impossible in the more stately and sharply angled vocabulary of the South. Their octosyllabics have not seldom a careless facility not unworthy of Swift in his best mood. They had attained the highest skill and grace in narrative, as the lays of Marie de France and the *Lai de l'Oiselet* bear witness.[1] Above all, they had learned how to brighten the hitherto monotonous web of story with the gayer hues of fancy.

It is no improbable surmise that the sudden and surprising development of the more strictly epical poetry in the North of France, and especially its growing partiality for historical in preference to mythical subjects, were due to the Normans. The poetry of the Danes was much of it authentic history, or what was believed to be so; the heroes of their Sagas were real men, with wives and children, with relations public and domestic, on the common levels of life, and not mere creatures of imagination, who dwell like stars apart from the vulgar cares and interests of men. If we compare Havelok with the least idealized figures of Carlovingian or Arthurian romance, we shall have a keen sense of this difference. Manhood has taken the place of caste, and homeliness of exaggeration. Havelok says, —

> "Godwot, I will with thee gang
> For to learn some good to get;
> Swinken would I for my meat;
> It is no shame for to swinken."

[1] If internal evidence may be trusted, the *Lai de l'Espine* is not hers.

This Dane, we see, is of our own make and stature, a being much nearer our kindly sympathies than his compatriot Ogier, of whom we are told,

"Dix piès de lonc avoit le chevalier."

But however large or small share we may allow to the Danes in changing the character of French poetry and supplanting the Romance with the Fabliau, there can be little doubt either of the kind or amount of influence which the Normans must have brought with them into England. I am not going to attempt a definition of the Anglo-Saxon element in English literature, for generalizations are apt to be as dangerous as they are tempting. But as a painter may draw a cloud so that we recognize its general truth, though the boundaries of real clouds never remain the same for two minutes together, so amid the changes of feature and complexion brought about by commingling of race, there still remains a certain cast of physiognomy which points back to some one ancestor of marked and peculiar character. It is toward this type that there is always a tendency to revert, to borrow Mr. Darwin's phrase, and I think the general belief is not without some adequate grounds which in France traces this predominant type to the Kelt, and in England to the Saxon. In old and stationary communities, where tradition has a chance to take root, and where several generations are present to the mind of each inhabitant, either by personal recollection or transmitted anecdote, everybody's peculiarities, whether of strength or weak-

ness, are explained and, as it were, justified upon some theory of hereditary bias. Such and such qualities he got from a grandfather on the spear or a great-uncle on the spindle side. This gift came in a right line from So-and-so; that failing came in by the dilution of the family blood with that of Such-a-one. In this way a certain allowance is made for every aberration from some assumed normal type, either in the way of reinforcement or defect, and that universal desire of the human mind to have everything accounted for — which makes the moon responsible for the whimsies of the weathercock — is cheaply gratified. But as mankind in the aggregate is always wiser than any single man, because its experience is derived from a larger range of observation and experience, and because the springs that feed it drain a wider region both of time and space, there is commonly some greater or smaller share of truth in all popular prejudices. The meteorologists are beginning to agree with the old women that the moon *is* an accessary before the fact in our atmospheric fluctuations. Now, although to admit this notion of inherited good or ill to its fullest extent would be to abolish personal character, and with it all responsibility, to abdicate freewill, and to make every effort at self-direction futile, there is no inconsiderable alloy of truth in it, nevertheless. No man can look into the title-deeds of what may be called his personal estate, his faculties, his predilections, his failings, — whatever, in short, sets him apart as a capital I, — without something like a

shock of dread to find how much of him is held in mortmain by those who, though long ago mouldered away to dust, are yet fatally alive and active in him for good or ill. What is true of individual men is true also of races, and the prevailing belief in a nation as to the origin of certain of its characteristics has something of the same basis in facts of observation as the village estimate of the traits of particular families. *Interdum vulgus rectum videt.*

We are apt, it is true, to talk rather loosely about our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, and to attribute to them in a vague way all the pith of our institutions and the motive power of our progress. For my own part, I think there is such a thing as being too Anglo-Saxon, and the warp and woof of the English national character, though undoubtedly two elements mainly predominate in it, is quite too complex for us to pick out a strand here and there, and affirm that the *body* of the fabric is of this or that. Our present concern with the Saxons is chiefly a literary one; but it leads to a study of general characteristics. What, then, so far as we can make it out, seems to be their leading mental feature? Plainly, understanding, common-sense, — a faculty which never carries its possessor very high in creative literature, though it may make him great as an acting and even thinking man. Take Dr. Johnson as an instance. The Saxon, as it appears to me, has never shown any capacity for art, nay, commonly commits ugly blunders when he is tempted in that direction. He has made the

best working institutions and the ugliest monuments among the children of men. He is wanting in taste, which is as much as to say that he has no true sense of proportion. His genius is his *solidity*, — an admirable foundation of national character. He is healthy, in no danger of liver-complaint, with digestive apparatus of amazing force and precision. He is the best farmer and best grazier among men, raises the biggest crops and the fattest cattle, and consumes proportionate quantities of both. He settles and sticks like a diluvial deposit on the warm, low-lying levels, physical and moral. He has a prodigious talent, to use our Yankee phrase, of *staying put*. You cannot move him; he and rich earth have a natural sympathy of cohesion. Not quarrelsome, but with indefatigable durability of fight in him, sound of stomach, and not too refined in nervous texture, he is capable of indefinitely prolonged punishment, with a singularly obtuse sense of propriety in acknowledging himself beaten. Among all races perhaps none has shown so acute a sense of the side on which its bread is buttered, and so great a repugnance for having fine phrases take the place of the butyraceous principle. They invented the words "humbug," "cant," "sham," "gag," "soft-sodder," "flapdoodle," and other disenchanting formulas whereby the devil of falsehood and unreality gets his effectual *apage Satana!*

An imperturbable perception of the *real* relations of things is the Saxon's leading quality, — no sense whatever, or at best small, of the ideal in

him. He has no notion that two and two ever make five, which is the problem the poet often has to solve. Understanding, that is, equilibrium of mind, intellectual good digestion, this, with unclogged biliary ducts, makes him mentally and physically what we call a very fixed fact; but you shall not find a poet in a hundred thousand square miles, — in many prosperous centuries of such. But one element of incalculable importance we have not mentioned. In this homely nature, the idea of God, and of a simplé and direct relation between the All-Father and his children, is deeply rooted. There, above all, will he have honesty and simplicity; less than anything else will he have the sacramental wafer, — that beautiful emblem of our dependence on Him who giveth the daily bread; less than anything will he have this smeared with that Barmecide butter of fair words. This is the lovely and noble side of his character. Indignation at this will make him forget crops and cattle; and this, after so many centuries, will give him at last a poet in the monk of Eisleben, who shall cut deep on the memory of mankind that brief creed of conscience, — "Here am I. God help me: I cannot otherwise." This, it seems to me, with dogged sense of justice, — both results of that equilibrium of thought which springs from clear-sighted understanding, — makes the beauty of the Saxon nature.

He believes in another world, and conceives of it without metaphysical subtleties as something very much after the pattern of this, but infinitely more desirable. Witness the vision of John Bunyan.

Once beat it into him that his eternal *well-being*, as he calls it, depends on certain conditions, that only so will the balance in the ledger of eternity be in his favor, and the man who seemed wholly of *this* world will give all that he has, even his life, with a superb simplicity and scorn of the theatric, for a chance in the next. Hard to move, his very solidity of nature makes him terrible when once fairly set agoing. He is the man of all others slow to admit the thought of revolution; but let him once admit it, he will carry it through and make it *stick*, — a secret hitherto undiscoverable by other races.

But poetry is not made out of the understanding; that is not the sort of block out of which you can carve wing-footed Mercuries. The question of common-sense is always, "What is it good for?" — a question which would abolish the rose and be answered triumphantly by the cabbage. The danger of the prosaic type of mind lies in the stolid sense of superiority which blinds it to everything ideal, to the use of anything that does not serve the practical purposes of life. Do we not remember how the all-observing and all-fathoming Shakespeare has typified this in Bottom the weaver? Surrounded by all the fairy creations of fancy, he sends one to fetch him the bag of a humble-bee, and can find no better employment for Mustard-seed than to help Cavalero Cobweb scratch his ass's head between the ears. When Titania, queen of that fair ideal world, offers him a feast of beauty, he says he has a good stomach to a pottle of hay!

The Anglo-Saxons never had any real literature of their own. They produced monkish chronicles in bad Latin, and legends of saints in worse metre. Their earlier poetry is essentially Scandinavian. It was that *gens inclytissima Northmannorum* that imported the divine power of imagination, — that power which, mingled with the solid Saxon understanding, produced at last the miracle of Stratford. It was to this adventurous race, which found America before Columbus, which, for the sake of freedom of thought, could colonize inhospitable Iceland, which, as it were, typifying the very action of the imaginative faculty itself, identified itself always with what it conquered, that we owe whatever aquiline features there are in the national physiognomy of the English race. It was through the Normans that the English mind and fancy, hitherto provincial and uncouth, were first infused with the lightness, grace, and self-confidence of Romance literature. They seem to have opened a window to the southward in that solid and somewhat sombre insular character, and it was a painted window all aglow with the figures of tradition and poetry. The old Gothic volume, grim with legends of devilish temptation and satanic lore, they illuminated with the gay and brilliant inventions of a softer climate and more genial moods. Even the stories of Arthur and his knights, toward which the stern Dante himself relented so far as to call them *gratissimas ambages*, most delightful circumlocutions, though of British original, were first set free from the dungeon of a barbarous dia-

lect by the French poets, and so brought back to England, and made popular there by the Normans.

Chaucer, to whom French must have been almost as truly a mother tongue as English, was familiar with all that had been done by Troubadour or Trouvère. In him we see the first result of the Norman yeast upon the home-baked Saxon loaf. The flour had been honest, the paste well kneaded, but the inspiring leaven was wanting till the Norman brought it over. Chaucer works still in the solid material of his race, but with what airy lightness has he not infused it? Without ceasing to be English, he has escaped from being insular. But he was something more than this; he was a scholar, a thinker, and a critic. He had studied the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, he had read Petrarca and Boccaccio, and some of the Latin poets. He calls Dante the great poet of Italy, and Petrarch a learned clerk. It is plain that he knew very well the truer purpose of poetry, and had even arrived at the higher wisdom of comprehending the aptitudes and limitations of his own genius. He saw clearly and felt keenly what were the faults and what the wants of the prevailing literature of his country. In the "Monk's Tale" he slyly satirizes the long-winded morality of Gower, as his prose antitype, Fielding, was to satirize the prolix sentimentality of Richardson. In the rhyme of Sir Thopas he gives the *coup de grace* to the romances of Chivalry, and in his own choice of a subject he heralds that new world in which the actual and the popular were to supplant the fantastic and the heroic.

Before Chaucer, modern Europe had given birth to one great poet, Dante; and contemporary with him was one supremely elegant one, Petrarch. Dante died only seven years before Chaucer was born, and, so far as culture is derived from books, the moral and intellectual influences to which they had been subjected, the speculative stimulus that may have given an impulse to their minds, — there could have been no essential difference between them. Yet there are certain points of resemblance and of contrast, and those not entirely fanciful, which seem to me of considerable interest. Both were of mixed race, Dante certainly, Chaucer presumably so. Dante seems to have inherited on the Teutonic side the strong moral sense, the almost nervous irritability of conscience, and the tendency to mysticism which made him the first of Christian poets, — first in point of time and first in point of greatness. From the other side he seems to have received almost in overplus a feeling of order and proportion, sometimes wellnigh hardening into mathematical precision and formalism, — a tendency which at last brought the poetry of the Romanic races to a dead-lock of artifice and decorum. Chaucer, on the other hand, drew from the South a certain airiness of sentiment and expression, a felicity of phrase and an elegance of turn, hitherto unprecedented and hardly yet matched in our literature, but all the while kept firm hold of his native soundness of understanding, and that genial humor which seems to be the proper element of worldly wisdom. With Dante, life represented the passage

of the soul from a state of nature to a state of grace; and there would have been almost an even chance whether (as Burns says) the *Divina Commedia* had turned out a song or a sermon, but for the wonderful genius of its author, which has compelled the sermon to sing and the song to preach, whether they would or no. With Chaucer, life is a pilgrimage, but only that his eye may be delighted with the varieties of costume and character. There are good morals to be found in Chaucer, but they are always incidental. With Dante the main question is the saving of the soul, with Chaucer it is the conduct of life. The distance between them is almost that between holiness and prudence. Dante applies himself to the realities, Chaucer to the scenery of life, and the former is consequently the more universal poet, as the latter is the more truly national one. Dante represents the justice of God, and Chaucer his loving-kindness. If there is anything that may properly be called satire in the one, it is like a blast of the divine wrath, before which the wretches cower and tremble, which rends away their cloaks of hypocrisy and their masks of worldly propriety, and leaves them shivering in the cruel nakedness of their shame. The satire of the other is genial with the broad sunshine of humor, into which the victims walk forth with a delightful unconcern, laying aside of themselves the disguises that seem to make them uncomfortably warm, till they have made a thorough betrayal of themselves so unconsciously that we almost pity while we laugh. Dante shows us the punishment of sins

against God and one's neighbor, in order that we may shun them, and so escape the doom that awaits them in the other world. Chaucer exposes the cheats of the transmuter of metals, of the begging friars, and of the pedlers of indulgences, in order that we may be on our guard against them in this world. If we are to judge of what is national only by the highest and most characteristic types, surely we cannot fail to see in Chaucer the true forerunner and prototype of Shakespeare, who, with an imagination of far deeper grasp, a far wider reach of thought, yet took the same delight in the pageantry of the actual world, and whose moral is the moral of worldly wisdom only heightened to the level of his wide-viewing mind, and made typical by the dramatic energy of his plastic nature.

Yet if Chaucer had little of that organic force of life which so inspires the poem of Dante that, as he himself says of the heavens, part answers to part with mutual interchange of light, he had a structural faculty which distinguishes him from all other English poets, his contemporaries, and which indeed is the primary distinction of poets properly so called. There is, to be sure, only one other English writer coeval with himself who deserves in any way to be compared with him, and that rather for contrast than for likeness.

With the single exception of Langland, the English poets, his contemporaries, were little else than bad versifiers of legends classic or mediæval, as it might happen, without selection and without art. Chaucer is the first who broke away from the

dreary traditional style, and gave not merely stories, but lively *pictures* of real life as the ever-renewed substance of poetry. He was a reformer, too, not only in literature, but in morals. But as in the former his exquisite tact saved him from all eccentricity, so in the latter the pervading sweetness of his nature could never be betrayed into harshness and invective. He seems incapable of indignation. He mused good-naturedly over the vices and follies of men, and, never forgetting that he was fashioned of the same clay, is rather apt to pity than condemn. There is no touch of cynicism in all he wrote. Dante's brush seems sometimes to have been smeared with the burning pitch of his own fiery lake. Chaucer's pencil is dipped in the cheerful color-box of the old illuminators, and he has their patient delicacy of touch, with a freedom far beyond their somewhat mechanic brilliancy.

English narrative poetry, as Chaucer found it, though it had not altogether escaped from the primal curse of long-windedness so painfully characteristic of its prototype, the French Romance of Chivalry, had certainly shown a feeling for the picturesque, a sense of color, a directness of phrase, and a simplicity of treatment which give it graces of its own and a turn peculiar to itself. In the easy knack of story-telling, the popular minstrels cannot compare with Marie de France. The lightsomeness of fancy, that leaves a touch of sunshine and is gone, is painfully missed in them all. Their incidents enter dispersedly, as the old stage directions used to say, and they have not learned the

art of concentrating their force on the key-point of their hearers' interest. They neither get fairly hold of their subject, nor, what is more important, does it get hold of them. But they sometimes yield to an instinctive hint of leaving-off at the right moment, and in their happy negligence achieve an effect only to be matched by the highest successes of art.

> "That lady heard his mourning all
> Right under her chamber wall,
> In her oriel where she was,
> Closëd well with royal glass;
> Fulfilled it was with imagery
> Every window, by and by;
> On each side had there a gin
> Sperred with many a divers pin;
> Anon that lady fair and free
> Undid a pin of ivory
> And wide the window she open set,
> The sun shone in at her closet."

It is true the old rhymer relapses a little into the habitual drone of his class, and shows half a mind to bolt into their common inventory style when he comes to his *gins* and *pins*, but he withstands the temptation manfully, and his sunshine fills our hearts with a gush as sudden as that which illumines the lady's oriel. Coleridge and Keats have each in his way felt the charm of this winsome picture, but have hardly equalled its hearty honesty, its economy of material, the supreme test of artistic skill. I admit that the phrase "*had* there a gin" is suspicious, and suggests a French original, but I remember nothing altogether so good in the romances from the other side of the Channel.

One more passage occurs to me, almost incomparable in its simple straightforward force and choice of the right word.

> "Sir Graysteel to his death thus thraws,
> He welters [wallows] and the grass updraws;
> . . . . . .
> A little while then lay he still,
> (Friends that saw him liked full ill,)
> And bled into his armor bright."

The last line, for suggestive reticence, almost deserves to be put beside the famous

> "Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante"

of the great master of laconic narration. In the same poem[1] the growing love of the lady, in its maidenliness of unconscious betrayal, is touched with a delicacy and tact as surprising as they are delightful. But such passages, which are the despair of poets who have to work in a language that has faded into diction, are exceptional. They are to be set down rather to good luck than to art. Even the stereotyped similes of these fortunate illiterates, like "weary as water in a weir," or "glad as grass is of the rain," are new, like nature, at the thousandth repetition. Perhaps our palled taste overvalues the wild flavor of these wayside treasure-troves. They are wood-strawberries, prized in proportion as we must turn over more leaves ere we find one. This popular literature is of value in helping us towards a juster estimate of Chaucer by showing what the mere language was capable of,

[1] *Sir Eger and Sir Grine* in the Percy Folio. The passage quoted is from Ellis.

and that all it wanted was a poet to put it through its paces. For though the poems I have quoted be, in their present form, later than he, they are, after all, but modernized versions of older copies, which they doubtless reproduce with substantial fidelity.

It is commonly assumed that Chaucer did for English what Dante is supposed to have done for Italian and Luther for German, that he, in short, in some hitherto inexplicable way, created it. But this is to speak loosely and without book. Languages are never made in any such fashion, still less are they the achievement of any single man, however great his genius, however powerful his individuality. They shape themselves by laws as definite as those which guide and limit the growth of other living organisms. Dante, indeed, has told us that he chose to write in the tongue that might be learned of nurses and chafferers in the market. His practice shows that he knew perfectly well that poetry has needs which cannot be answered by the vehicle of vulgar commerce between man and man. What he instinctively felt was, that there was the living heart of all speech, without whose help the brain were powerless to send will, motion, meaning, to the limbs and extremities. But it is true that a language, as respects the uses of literature, is liable to a kind of syncope. No matter how complete its vocabulary may be, how thorough an outfit of inflections and case-endings it may have, it is a mere dead body without a soul till some man of genius set its arrested pulses once

more athrob, and show what wealth of sweetness, scorn, persuasion, and passion lay there awaiting its liberator. In this sense it is hardly too much to say that Chaucer, like Dante, found his native tongue a dialect and left it a language. But it was not what he did with deliberate purpose of reform, it was his kindly and plastic genius that wrought this magic of renewal and inspiration. It was not the new words he introduced,[1] but his way of using the old ones, that surprised them into grace, ease, and dignity in their own despite. In order to feel fully how much he achieved, let any one subject himself to a penitential course of reading in his contemporary, Gower, who worked in a material to all intents and purposes the same, or listen for a moment to the barbarous jangle which Lydgate and Occleve contrive to draw from the instrument their master had tuned so deftly. Gower has positively raised tediousness to the precision of science, he has made dulness an heirloom for the students of our literary history. As you slip to and fro on the frozen levels of his verse, which give no foothold to the mind, as your nervous ear awaits the inevitable recurrence of his rhyme, regularly pertinacious as the tick of an eight-day clock and reminding you of Wordsworth's

> "Once more the ass did lengthen out
> The hard, dry, seesaw of his horrible bray,"

you learn to dread, almost to respect, the powers of this indefatigable man. He is the undertaker of the fair mediæval legend, and his style has the

[1] I think he tried one now and then, like "eyen *columbine*."

hateful gloss, the seemingly unnatural length of a coffin. Love, beauty, passion, nature, art, life, the natural and theological virtues, — there is nothing beyond his power to disenchant, nothing out of which the tremendous hydraulic press of his allegory (or whatever it is, for I am not sure if it be not something even worse) will not squeeze all feeling and freshness and leave it a juiceless pulp. It matters not where you try him, whether his story be Christian or pagan, borrowed from history or fable, you cannot escape him. Dip in at the middle or the end, dodge back to the beginning, the patient old man is there to take you by the button and go on with his imperturbable narrative. You may have left off with Clytemnestra, and you begin again with Samson; it makes no odds, for you cannot tell one from tother. His tediousness is omnipresent, and like Dogberry he could find in his heart to bestow it all (and more if he had it) on your worship. The word *lengthy* has been charged to our American account, but it must have been invented by the first reader of Gower's works, the only inspiration of which they were ever capable. Our literature had to lie by and recruit for more than four centuries ere it could give us an equal vacuity in Tupper, so persistent a uniformity of commonplace in the "Recreations of a Country Parson." Let us be thankful that the industrious Gower never found time for recreation!

But a fairer as well as more instructive comparison lies between Chaucer and the author of "Piers Ploughman." Langland has as much tenderness,

as much interest in the varied picture of life, as hearty a contempt for hypocrisy, and almost an equal sense of fun. He has the same easy abundance of matter. But what a difference! It is the difference between the poet and the man of poetic temperament. The abundance of the one is a continual fulness within the fixed limits of good taste; that of the other is squandered in overflow. The one can be profuse on occasion; the other is diffuse whether he will or no. The one is full of talk; the other is garrulous. What in one is the refined *bonhomie* of a man of the world, is a rustic shrewdness in the other. Both are kindly in their satire, and have not (like too many reformers) that vindictive love of virtue which spreads the stool of repentance with thistle-burrs before they invite the erring to seat themselves therein. But what in "Piers Ploughman" is sly fun, has the breadth and depth of humor in Chaucer; and it is plain that while the former was taken up by his moral purpose, the main interest of the latter turned to perfecting the form of his work. In short, Chaucer had that fine literary sense which is as rare as genius, and, united with it, as it was in him, assures an immortality of fame. It is not merely what he has to say, but even more the agreeable way he has of saying it, that captivates our attention and gives him an assured place in literature. Above all, it is not in detached passages that his charm lies, but in the entirety of expression and the cumulative effect of many particulars working toward a common end. Now though *ex ungue leonem* be a good rule in compar-

ative anatomy, its application, except in a very limited way, in criticism is sure to mislead; for we should always bear in mind that the really great writer is great in the mass, and is to be tested less by his cleverness in the elaboration of parts than by that *reach* of mind which is incapable of random effort, which selects, arranges, combines, rejects, denies itself the cheap triumph of immediate effects, because it is absorbed by the controlling charm of proportion and unity. A careless good-luck of phrase is delightful; but criticism cleaves to the teleological argument, and distinguishes the creative intellect, not so much by any happiness of natural endowment as by the marks of design. It is true that one may sometimes discover by a single verse whether an author have imagination, or may make a shrewd guess whether he have style or no, just as by a few spoken words you may judge of a man's accent; but the true artist in language is never spotty, and needs no guide-boards of admiring italics, a critical method introduced by Leigh Hunt, whose feminine temperament gave him acute perceptions at the expense of judgment. This is the Bœotian method, which offers us a brick as a sample of the house, forgetting that it is not the goodness of the separate bricks, but the way in which they are put together, that brings them within the province of art, and makes the difference between a heap and a house. A great writer does not reveal himself here and there, but everywhere. Langland's verse runs mostly like a brook, with a beguiling and wellnigh slumberous prattle, but he,

more often than any writer of his class, flashes into salient lines, gets inside our guard with the home-thrust of a forthright word, and he gains if taken piecemeal. His imagery is naturally and vividly picturesque, as where he says of Old Age, —

> "Eld the hoar
> That was in the vauntward,
> And bare the banner before death," —

and he softens to a sweetness of sympathy beyond Chaucer when he speaks of the poor or tells us that Mercy is "sib of all sinful"; but to compare "Piers Ploughman" with the "Canterbury Tales" is to compare sermon with song.

Let us put a bit of Langland's satire beside one of Chaucer's. Some people in search of Truth meet a pilgrim and ask him whence he comes. He gives a long list of holy places, appealing for proof to the relics on his hat: —

> "'I have walked full wide in wet and in dry
> And sought saints for my soul's health.'
> 'Know'st thou ever a relic that is called Truth?
> Couldst thou show us the way where that wight dwelleth?'
> 'Nay, so God help me,' said the man then,
> 'I saw never palmer with staff nor with scrip
> Ask after him ever till now in this place.'"

This is a good hit, and the poet is satisfied; but, in what I am going to quote from Chaucer, everything becomes picture, over which lies broad and warm the sunshine of humorous fancy.

> "In oldë dayës of the King Artour
> Of which that Britouns speken gret honour,
> All was this lond fulfilled of fayerie:
> The elf-queen with her joly compaignie

Dancëd ful oft in many a grenë mede:
This was the old opinion as I rede;
I speke of many hundrid yer ago:
But now can no man see none elvës mo,
For now the gretë charite and prayëres
Of lymytours and other holy freres
That sechen every lond and every streem,
As thick as motis in the sonnëbeam,
Blessyng halles, chambres, kichenës, and boures,
Citees and burghës, castels hihe and toures,
Thorpës and bernes, shepnes and dayeries,
This makith that ther ben no fayeries.
For ther as wont to walken was an elf
There walkith none but the lymytour himself,
In undermelës and in morwenynges,
And sayth his matyns and his holy thinges,
As he goth in his lymytatioun.
Wommen may now go saufly up and doun;
In every bush or under every tre
There is none other incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem no dishonóur."

How cunningly the contrast is suggested here between the Elf-queen's jolly company and the unsocial limiters, thick as motes in the sunbeam, yet each walking by himself! And with what an air of innocent unconsciousness is the deadly thrust of the last verse given, with its contemptuous emphasis on the *he* that seems so well-meaning! Even Shakespeare, who seems to come in after everybody has done his best with a "Let me take hold a minute and show you how to do it," could not have bettered this.

"Piers Ploughman" is the best example I know of what is called popular poetry, — of compositions, that is, which contain all the simpler elements of poetry, but still in solution, not crystallized around

any thread of artistic purpose. In it appears at her best the Anglo-Saxon Muse, a first cousin of Poor Richard, full of proverbial wisdom, who always brings her knitting in her pocket, and seems most at home in the chimney-corner. It is genial; it plants itself firmly on human nature with its rights and wrongs; it has a surly honesty, prefers the downright to the gracious, and conceives of speech as a tool rather than a musical instrument. If we should seek for a single word that would define it most precisely, we should not choose simplicity, but homeliness. There is more or less of this in all early poetry, to be sure; but I think it especially proper to English poets, and to the most English among them, like Cowper, Crabbe, and one is tempted to add Wordsworth, — where he forgets Coleridge's private lectures. In reading such poets as Langland, also, we are not to forget a certain charm of distance in the very language they use, making it unhackneyed without being alien. As it is the chief function of the poet to make the familiar novel, these fortunate early risers of literature, who gather phrases with the dew still on them, have their poetry done for them, as it were, by their vocabulary. But in Chaucer, as in all great poets, the language gets its charm from him. The force and sweetness of his genius kneaded more kindly together the Latin and Teutonic elements of our mother tongue, and made something better than either. The necessity of writing poetry, and not mere verse, made him a reformer whether he would or no; and the instinct

of his finer ear was a guide such as none before him or contemporary with him, nor indeed any that came after him, till Spenser, could command. Gower had no notion of the uses of rhyme except as a kind of crease at the end of every eighth syllable, where the verse was to be folded over again into another layer. He says, for example,

> "This maiden Canacee was hight,
> Both in the day and eke by night,"

as if people commonly changed their names at dark. And he could not even contrive to say this without the clumsy pleonasm of *both* and *eke*. Chaucer was put to no such shifts of piecing out his metre with loose-woven bits of baser stuff. He himself says, in the "Man of Law's Tale," —

> "Me lists not of the chaff nor of the straw
> To make so long a tale as of the corn."

One of the world's three or four great story-tellers, he was also one of the best versifiers that ever made English trip and sing with a gayety that seems careless, but where every foot beats time to the tune of the thought. By the skilful arrangement of his pauses he evaded the monotony of the couplet, and gave to the rhymed pentameter, which he made our heroic measure, something of the architectural repose of blank verse. He found our language lumpish, stiff, unwilling, too apt to speak Saxonly in grouty monosyllables; he left it enriched with the longer measure of the Italian and Provençal poets. He reconciled, in the harmony of his verse, the English bluntness with the dignity and elegance of the less homely Southern speech.

Though he did not and could not create our language (for he who writes to be read does not write for linguisters), yet it is true that he first made it easy, and to that extent modern, so that Spenser, two hundred years later, studied his method and called him master. He first wrote *English;* and it was a feeling of this, I suspect, that made it fashionable in Elizabeth's day to "talk pure Chaucer." Already we find in his works verses that might pass without question in Milton or even Wordsworth, so mainly unchanged have the language of poetry and the movement of verse remained from his day to our own.

"Thou Polymnia
On Pérnaso, that, with[1] thy sisters glade,
By Helicon, not far from Cirrea,
Singest with voice memorial in the shade,
Under the laurel which that may not fade."

"And downward from a hill under a bent
There stood the temple of Mars omnipotent
Wrought all of burnëd steel, of which th' entrée
Was long and strait and ghastly for to see:
The northern light in at the doorës shone
For window in the wall ne was there none
Through which men mighten any light discerne;
The dore was all of adamant eterne."

And here are some lines that would not seem out of place in the "Paradise of Dainty Devises": —

"Hide, Absolom, thy giltë [gilded] tresses clear,
Esther lay thou thy meekness all adown.
. . . . . .
Make of your wifehood no comparison;
Hide ye your beauties Ysoude and Elaine,
My lady cometh, that all this may distain."

[1] Commonly printed *hath*.

When I remember Chaucer's malediction upon his scrivener, and consider that by far the larger proportion of his verses (allowing always for change of pronunciation) are perfectly accordant with our present accentual system, I cannot believe that he ever wrote an imperfect line. His ear would never have tolerated the verses of nine syllables, with a strong accent on the first, attributed to him by Mr. Skeat and Mr. Morris. Such verses seem to me simply impossible in the pentameter iambic as Chaucer wrote it. A great deal of misapprehension would be avoided in discussing English metres, if it were only understood that quantity in Latin and quantity in English mean very different things. Perhaps the best quantitative verses in our language (better even than Coleridge's) are to be found in Mother Goose, composed by nurses wholly by ear and beating time as they danced the baby on their knee. I suspect Chaucer and Shakespeare would be surprised into a smile by the learned arguments which supply their halting verses with every kind of excuse except that of being readable. When verses were written to be chanted, more license could be allowed, for the ear tolerates the widest deviations from habitual accent in words that are sung. *Segnius irritant demissa per aurem.* To some extent the same thing is true of anapæstic and other tripping measures, but we cannot admit it in marching tunes like those of Chaucer. He wrote for the eye more than for the voice, as poets had begun to do long before.[1] Some loose

[1] Froissart's description of the book of traités amoureux et de

talk of Coleridge, loose in spite of its affectation of scientific precision, about "retardations" and the like, has misled many honest persons into believing that they can make good verse out of bad prose. Coleridge himself, from natural fineness of ear, was the best metrist among modern English poets, and, read with proper allowances, his remarks upon versification are always instructive to whoever is not rhythm-deaf. But one has no patience with the dyspondæuses, the pæon primuses, and what not, with which he darkens verses that are to be explained only by the contemporary habits of pronunciation. Till after the time of Shakespeare we must always bear in mind that it is not a language of books but of living speech that we have to deal with. Of this language Coleridge had little knowledge, except what could be acquired through the ends of his fingers as they lazily turned the leaves of his haphazard reading. If his eye was caught by a single passage that gave him

moralité, which he had had engrossed for presentation to Richard II. in 1394, is enough to bring tears to the eyes of a modern author. "Et lui plut très grandement; et plaire bien lui devoit car il était enluminé, écrit et historié et couvert de vermeil velours à dis cloux d'argent dorés d'or, et roses d'or au milieu, et à deux grands fremaulx dorés et richement ouvrés au milieu de rosiers d'or." How lovingly he lingers over it, hooking it together with *et* after *et!* But two centuries earlier, while the *jongleurs* were still in full song, poems were also read aloud.

> "Pur remembrer des ancessours
> Les faits et les dits et les mours,
> Deit l'en les livres et les gestes
> Et les estoires *lire a festes*." — *Roman du Rou.*

But Chaucer wrote for the private reading of the closet.

a chance to theorize he did not look farther. Speaking of Massinger, for example, he says, "When a speech is interrupted, or one of the characters speaks aside, the last syllable of the former speech and first of the succeeding Massinger counts for one, because both are supposed to be spoken at the same moment.

'And felt the sweetness *of't*
'*How* her mouth runs over.'"

Now fifty instances may be cited from Massinger which tell against this fanciful notion, for one that seems, and only seems, in its favor. Any one tolerably familiar with the dramatists knows that in the passage quoted by Coleridge, the *how* being emphatic, "*how her*" was pronounced *how'r*. He tells us that "Massinger is fond of the anapæst in the first and third foot, as: —

'Tŏ yoŭr mōre|thăn mās|cŭlinĕ rēa|sŏn thāt|cŏmmānds 'ĕm ‖.'

Likewise of the second pæon(⏑ – ⏑ ⏑) in the first foot, followed by four trochees (– ⏑), as: —

'Sŏ grēēdĭlў | lōng fŏr, | knōw theĭr | tĭtĭll|ātiŏns.'"

In truth, he was no fonder of them than his brother dramatists who, like him, wrote for the voice by the ear. "To your" is still one syllable in ordinary speech, and "masculine" and "greedily" were and are dissyllables or trisyllables according to their place in the verse. Coleridge was making pedantry of a very simple matter. Yet he has said with perfect truth of Chaucer's verse, "Let a few plain rules be given for sounding the final *e* of syllables, and for expressing the terminations of such words

as *ocëan* and *natiön*, &c., as dissyllables, — or let the syllables to be sounded in such cases be marked by a competent metrist. This simple expedient would, with a very few trifling exceptions, where the errors are inveterate, enable any one to feel the perfect smoothness and harmony of Chaucer's verse." But let us keep widely clear of Latin and Greek terms of prosody! It is also more important here than even with the dramatists of Shakespeare's time to remember that we have to do with a language caught more from the ear than from books. The best school for learning to understand Chaucer's elisions, compressions, slurrings-over and runnings-together of syllables is to listen to the habitual speech of rustics with whom language is still plastic to meaning, and hurries or prolongs itself accordingly. Here is a contraction frequent in Chaucer, and still common in New England: —

"But me were lever than [lever 'n] all this town, quod he."

Let one example suffice for many. To Coleridge's rules another should be added by a wise editor; and that is to restore the final *n* in the infinitive and third person plural of verbs, and in such other cases as can be justified by the authority of Chaucer himself. Surely his ear could never have endured the sing-song of such verses as

"I couthe telle for a gowne-cloth,"

or

"Than ye to me schuld breke youre trouthe."

Chaucer's measure is so uniform (making due allowances) that words should be transposed or even omitted where the verse manifestly demands it, —

and with copyists so long and dull of ear this is often the case. Sometimes they leave out a needful word: —

" But er [the] thunder stynte, there cometh rain,"
" When [that] we ben yflattered and ypraised,"
" Tak [ye] him for the greatest gentleman."

Sometimes they thrust in a word or words that hobble the verse: —

" She trowed he were yfel in [some] maladie,"
" Ye faren like a man [that] had lost his wit,"
" Then have I got of you the maystrie, quod she,"
(Then have I got the maystery, quod she,)
" And quod the jugë [also] thou must lose thy head."

Sometimes they give a wrong word identical in meaning: —

" And therwithal he knew [couthë] mo proverbes."

Sometimes they change the true order of the words: —

" Therefore no woman of clerkës is [is of clerkës] praised "
" His felaw lo, here he stont [stont he] hool on live."

" He that covèteth is a porë wight
For he wold have that is not in his might;
But he that nought hath ne coveteth nought to have."

Here the " but " of the third verse belongs at the head of the first, and we get rid of the anomaly of " coveteth " differently accented within two lines. Nearly all the seemingly unmetrical verses may be righted in this way. I find a good example of this in the last stanza of " Troilus and Creseide." As it stands, we read, —

" Thou one, two, and three, eterne on live
That raignast aie in three, two and one."

It is plain that we should read "one *and* two" in the first verse, and "three *and* two" in the second. Remembering, then, that Chaucer was here translating Dante, I turned (after making the correction) to the original, and found as I expected

> "Quell' uno *e* due e tre che sempre vive
> E regna sempre in tre *e* due ed uno."
> (Par. xiv. 28, 29.)

In the stanza before this we have, —

> "To thee and to the philosophic*all* strode,
> To vouchsafe [vouchësafe] there need is, to correct";

and further on, —

> "With all mine herte' of mercy ever I pray
> And to the Lord aright thus I speake and say,"

where we must either strike out the second "I" or put it after "speake."

One often finds such changes made by ear justified by the readings in other texts, and we cannot but hope that the Chaucer Society will give us the means of at last settling upon a version which shall make the poems of one of the most fluent of metrists at least readable. Let any one compare the "Franklin's Tale" in the Aldine edition [1] with the text given by Wright, and he will find both sense and metre clear themselves up in a surprising way. A careful collation of texts, by the way, confirms one's confidence in Tyrwhitt's good taste and thoroughness.

A writer in the "Proceedings of the Philological Society" has lately undertaken to prove that Chaucer did not sound the final or medial *e*, and throws

[1] One of the very worst, be it said in passing.

us back on the old theory that he wrote "riding-rime," that is, verse to the eye and not the ear. This he attempts to do by showing that the Anglo-Norman poets themselves did not sound the *e*, or, at any rate, were not uniform in so doing. It should seem a sufficient answer to this merely to ask whence modern French poetry derived its rules of pronunciation so like those of Chaucer, so different from those of prose. But it is not enough to prove that some of the Anglo-Norman rhymers were bad versifiers. Let us look for examples in the works of the best poet among them all, Marie de France, with whose works Chaucer was certainly familiar. What was *her* practice? I open at random and find enough to overthrow the whole theory: —

"Od sa fillë[1] ke le cela —
Tut li curagës li fremi —
Di mei, fet-elë par ta fei —
La Dameiselë l'aporta —
Kar ne li sembla mië boens —
La damë l'aveit apelée —
E la merë l'areisuna."

But how about the elision?

"Le palï' esgardë sur le lit —
Et elë' est devant li alée —
Belë' amië [cf. mië, above] nel' me celez.
La damë' ad sa fillë' amenée."

These are all on a single page,[2] and there are some

[1] Whence came, pray, the Elizabethan *commandëment*, *chapëlain*, *surëty*, and a score of others? Whence the Scottish *bonny*, and so many English words of Romance derivation ending in *y*?

[2] *Poésies de Marie de France*, tome i. p. 168.

to spare. How about the *hiatus*? On the same page I find, —

> "Kar l'Ercēveskē i esteit —
> Pur eus beneistre' e enseiner."

What was the practice of Wace? Again I open at random.

> "N'osa remaindre' en Normandiē,
> Maiz, quant la guerrē fu finiē,
> Od son herneiz en Puille' ala —
> Cil de Baieuēs lungēment —
> Ne il nes pout par forcē prendre —
> Dunc la vilē mult amendout,
> Prisons e preiēs amenout."[1]

Again we have the sounded final *e*, the elision, and the *hiatus*. But what possible reason is there for supposing that Chaucer would go to obscure minstrels to learn the rules of French versification? Nay, why are we to suppose that he followed them at all? In his case as in theirs, as in that of the Italians, with the works of whose two greater poets he was familiar, it was the language itself and the usages of pronunciation that guided the poet, and not arbitrary laws laid down by a synod of verse-makers. Chaucer's verse differs from that of Gower and Lydgate precisely as the verse of Spenser differs from that of Gascoigne, and for the same reason, that he was a great poet, to whom measure was a natural vehicle. But admitting that he must have formed his style on the French poets, would he not have gone for lessons to the most famous and popular among them, — the authors of the "Roman de la Rose"? Wherever

[1] *Le Roman de Rou*, tome ii. p. 390.

you open that poem, you find Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung following precisely the same method, — a method not in the least arbitrary, but inherent in the material which they wrought. The *e* sounded or absorbed under the same conditions, the same slurring of diphthongs, the same occasional *hiatus*, the same compression of several vowels into one sound where they immediately follow each other. Shakespeare and Milton would supply examples enough of all these practices that seem so incredible to those who write about versification without sufficient fineness of sense to feel the difference between Ben Jonson's blank verse and Marlow's. Some men are verse-deaf as others are color-blind, — Messrs. Malone and Guest, for example.

I try Rutebeuf in the same haphazard way, and chance brings me upon his "Pharisian." This poem is in stanzas, the verses of the first of which have all of them masculine rhymes, those of the second feminine ones, and so on in such continual alternation to the end, as to show that it was done with intention to avoid monotony. Of feminine rhymes we find ypocrisië, famë, justicë, mesurë, yglisë. But did Rutebeuf mean so to pronounce them? I open again at the poem of the "Secrestain," which is written in regular octosyllabics, and read, —

"Envië fet homë tuer,
Et si fet bonnë remuer —
Envië greve', envië blecë,
Envië confont charitë
Envie' ocist humilitë, —

Estoit en ce païs en vië
Sanz orgueil ere' *et* sanz envië—
La glorieusë, damë, chierë." [1]

Froissart was Chaucer's contemporary. What was his usage?

"J'avoië fait en ce voiaigë
Et je li di, 'Ma damë s'ai-je
Pour vous ëu maint souvenir';
Mais je ne sui pas bien hardis
De vous remonstrer, damë chierë,
Par quel art ne par quel manierë,
J'ai ëu ce comencëment
De l'amourous atouchëment."

If we try Philippe Mouskes, a mechanical rhymer, if ever there was one, and therefore the surer not to let go the leading-strings of rule, the result is the same.

But Chaucer, it is argued, was not uniform in his practice. Would this be likely? Certainly not with those terminations (like *courtesië*) which are questioned, and in diphthongs generally. Dante took precisely the same liberties.

"Fac*ea* le stelle a n*oi* parer più rade,"
"Nè fu per fantas*ia* giamm*ai* compreso,"
"P*oi* p*iovve* dentro all 'alta fantas*ia*,"
"Sol*ea* valore e cortes*ia* trovarsi,"
"Che ne 'nvogliava amor e cortes*ia*."

Here we have *fantasì* and *fantasiä*, *cortesì* and *cortesiä*. Even Pope has *promiscuous*, *obsequious*, as trisyllables, *individual* as a quadrisyllable, and words like *tapestry*, *opera*, indifferently as trochees or dactyls according to their place in the verse.

[1] Rutebeuf, tome i. pp. 203 seqq. 304 seqq.

Donne even goes so far as to make Cain a monosyllable and dissyllable in the same verse: —

"Sister and wife to Cain, Caïn that first did plough."

The cæsural pause (a purely imaginary thing in accentual metres) may be made to balance a line like this of Donne's,

"Are they not like | singers at doors for meat,"

but we defy any one by any trick of voice to make it supply a missing syllable in what is called our heroic measure, so mainly used by Chaucer.

Enough and far more than enough on a question about which it is as hard to be patient as about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays. It is easy to find all manner of bad metres among these versifiers, and plenty of inconsistencies, many or most of them the fault of careless or ignorant transcribers, but whoever has read them thoroughly, and with enough philological knowledge of cognate languages to guide him, is sure that they at least aimed at regularity, precisely as he is convinced that Raynouard's rule about singular and plural terminations has plenty of evidence to sustain it, despite the numerous exceptions. To show what a bad versifier *could* make out of the same language that Chaucer used, I copy one stanza from a contemporary poem.

"When Phebus fresh was in chare resplendent,
In the moneth of May erly in a morning,
I hard two lovers profer this argument
In the yeere of our Lord a M. by rekening,
CCCXL. and VIII. yeere following.

O potent princesse conserve true lovers all
And grant them thy region and blisse celestial." [1]

Here is riding-rhyme, and on a very hard horse too! Can any one be insensible to the difference between such stuff as this and the measure of Chaucer? Is it possible that with him the one halting verse should be the rule, and the twenty musical ones the exception? Let us take heed to his own words: —

"And, for there is so great diversitë
In English, and in writing of our tong,
So pray I God [2] that none miswritë the
Ne the mismetre for defaut of tong,
And redde whereso thou be or ellës song
That thou be understood God I beseech."

Yet more. Boccaccio's *ottava rima* is almost as regular as that of Tasso. Was Chaucer unconscious of this? It will be worth while to compare a stanza of the original with one of the translation: —

"Era cortese Ettore di natura
Però vedendo di costei il gran pianto,
Ch 'era più bella ch 'altra creatura,
Con pio parlare confortolla alquanto,
Dicendo, lascia con la ria ventura
Tuo padre andar che tutti ha offeso tanto,
E tu, sicura e lieta, senza noia,
Mentre t 'aggrada, con noi resta in Troia." [3]

"Now was this Hector pitous of naturë,
And saw that she was sorrowful begon

[1] From the *Craft of Lovers*, attributed by Ritson to Lydgate, but too bad even for him.

[2] Here the received texts give "So pray I *to* God." Cf. "But Reason said him." *T. & C.*

[3] Corrected from Kissner, p. 18.

And that she was so faire a creaturë,
Of his goodnesse he gladed her anon
And said [saidë] let your father's treason gon
Forth with mischance, and ye yourself in joy
Dwelleth with us while [that] you list in Troy."

If the Italian were read with the same ignorance that has wreaked itself on Chaucer, the riding-rhyme would be on its high horse in almost every line of Boccaccio's stanza. The same might be said of many a verse in Donne's satires. Spenser in his eclogues for February, May, and September evidently took it for granted that he had caught the measure of Chaucer, and it would be rather amusing, as well as instructive, to hear the maintainers of the hop-skip-and-jump theory of versification attempt to make the elder poet's verses dance to the tune for which one of our greatest metrists (in his philological deafness) supposed their feet to be trained.

I will give one more example of Chaucer's verse, again making my selection from one of his less mature works. He is speaking of Tarquin: —

" **And ay the morë he was in despair**
The more he coveted and thought her fair;
His blindë lust was all his coveting.
On morrow when the bird began to sing
Unto the siege he cometh full privily
And by himself he walketh soberly
The imáge of her recording alway new:
Thus lay her hair, and thus fresh was her hue,
Thus sate, thus spake, thus span, this was her cheer,
Thus fair she was, and this was her manére.
All this conceit his heart hath new ytake,
And as the sea, with tempest all toshake,

That after, when the storm is all ago,
Yet will the water quap a day or two,
Right so, though that her formë were absént,
The pleasance of her forme was presént."

And this passage leads me to say a few words of Chaucer as a descriptive poet; for I think it a great mistake to attribute to him any properly dramatic power, as some have done. Even Herr Hertzberg, in his remarkably intelligent essay, is led a little astray on this point by his enthusiasm. Chaucer is a great narrative poet; and, in this species of poetry, though the author's personality should never be obtruded, it yet unconsciously pervades the whole, and communicates an individual quality, — a kind of flavor of its own. This very quality, and it is one of the highest in its way and place, would be fatal to all dramatic force. The narrative poet is occupied with his characters as picture, with their grouping, even their costume, it may be, and he feels for and with them instead of being they for the moment, as the dramatist must always be. The story-teller must possess the situation perfectly in all its details, while the imagination of the dramatist must be possessed and mastered by it. The latter puts before us the very passion or emotion itself in its utmost intensity; the former gives them, not in their primary form, but in that derivative one which they have acquired by passing through his own mind and being modified by his reflection. The deepest pathos of the drama, like the quiet "no more but so?" with which Shakespeare tells us that Ophelia's heart is burst-

ing, is sudden as a stab, while in narrative it is more or less suffused with pity, — a feeling capable of prolonged sustention. This presence of the author's own sympathy is noticeable in all Chaucer's pathetic passages, as, for instance, in the lamentation of Constance over her child in the "Man of Law's Tale." When he comes to the sorrow of his story, he seems to croon over his thoughts, to soothe them and dwell upon them with a kind of pleased compassion, as a child treats a wounded bird which he fears to grasp too tightly, and yet cannot make up his heart wholly to let go. It is true also of his humor that it pervades his comic tales like sunshine, and never dazzles the attention by a sudden flash. Sometimes he brings it in parenthetically, and insinuates a sarcasm so slyly as almost to slip by without our notice, as where he satirizes provincialism by the cock who

> "By nature knew ech ascensioun
> Of equinoxial in thilke toun."

Sometimes he turns round upon himself and smiles at a trip he has made into fine writing: —

> "Till that the brightë sun had lost his hue,
> For th' orisont had reft the sun his light,
> (This is as much to sayen as 'it was night.')"

Nay, sometimes it twinkles roguishly through his very tears, as in the

> "'Why wouldest thou be dead,' these women cry,
> 'Thou haddest gold enough — and Emily?'"

that follows so close upon the profoundly tender despair of Arcite's farewell: —

"What is this world? What asken men to have?
Now with his love now in the coldë grave
Alone withouten any company!"

The power of diffusion without being diffuse would seem to be the highest merit of narration, giving it that easy flow which is so delightful. Chaucer's descriptive style is remarkable for its lowness of tone, — for that combination of energy with simplicity which is among the rarest gifts in literature. Perhaps all is said in saying that he has style at all, for that consists mainly in the absence of undue emphasis and exaggeration, in the clear uniform pitch which penetrates our interest and retains it, where mere loudness would only disturb and irritate.

Not that Chaucer cannot be intense, too, on occasion; but it is with a quiet intensity of his own, that comes in as it were by accident.

"Upon a thickë palfrey, paper-white,
With saddle red embroidered with delight,
Sits Dido:
And she is fair as is the brightë morrow
That healeth sickë folk of nightës sorrow.
Upon a courser startling as the fire,
Æneas sits."

Pandarus, looking at Troilus,

"Took up a light and found his countenance
As for to look upon an old romance."

With Chaucer it is always the thing itself and not the description of it that is the main object. His picturesque bits are incidental to the story, glimpsed in passing; they never stop the way. His key is so low that his high lights are never obtrusive.

His imitators, like Leigh Hunt, and Keats in his "Endymion," missing the nice gradation with which the master toned everything down, become streaky. Hogarth, who reminds one of him in the variety and natural action of his figures, is like him also in the subdued brilliancy of his coloring. When Chaucer condenses, it is because his conception is vivid. He does not need to personify Revenge, for personification is but the subterfuge of unimaginative and professional poets; but he embodies the very passion itself in a verse that makes us glance over our shoulder as if we heard a stealthy tread behind us: —

"The smiler with the knife hid under the cloak."[1]

And yet how unlike is the operation of the imaginative faculty in him and Shakespeare! When the latter describes, his epithets imply always an impression on the moral sense (so to speak) of the person who hears or sees. The sun "flatters the mountain-tops with sovereign eye"; the bending "weeds lacquey the dull stream"; the shadow of the falcon "coucheth the fowl below"; the smoke is "helpless"; when Tarquin enters the chamber of Lucrece "the threshold grates the door to have him heard." His outward sense is merely a window through which the metaphysical eye looks forth, and his mind passes over at once from the simple sensation to the complex *meaning* of it, — feels *with* the object instead of merely feeling it. His imagination is forever dramatizing. Chaucer gives only

[1] Compare this with the Mumbo-Jumbo Revenge in Collins's Ode.

the direct impression made on the eye or ear. He was the first great poet who really loved outward nature as the source of conscious pleasurable emotion. The Troubadour hailed the return of spring; but with him it was a piece of empty ritualism. Chaucer took a true delight in the new green of the leaves and the return of singing birds, — a delight as simple as that of Robin Hood: —

> "In summer when the shaws be sheen,
> And leaves be large and long,
> It is full merry in fair forest
> To hear the small birds' song."

He has never so much as heard of the "burthen and the mystery of all this unintelligible world." His flowers and trees and birds have never bothered themselves with Spinoza. He himself sings more like a bird than any other poet, because it never occurred to him, as to Goethe, that he ought to do so. He pours himself out in sincere joy and thankfulness. When we compare Spenser's imitations of him with the original passages, we feel that the delight of the later poet was more in the expression than in the thing itself. Nature with him is only good to be transfigured by art. We walk among Chaucer's sights and sounds; we listen to Spenser's musical reproduction of them. In the same way, the pleasure which Chaucer takes in telling his stories has in itself the effect of consummate skill, and makes us follow all the windings of his fancy with sympathetic interest. His best tales run on like one of our inland rivers, sometimes hastening a little and turning upon themselves in eddies

that dimple without retarding the current; sometimes loitering smoothly, while here and there a quiet thought, a tender feeling, a pleasant image, a golden-hearted verse, opens quietly as a water-lily, to float on the surface without breaking it into ripple. The vulgar intellectual palate hankers after the titillation of foaming phrase, and thinks nothing good for much that does not go off with a pop like a champagne cork. The mellow suavity of more precious vintages seems insipid: but the taste, in proportion as it refines, learns to appreciate the indefinable flavor, too subtile for analysis. A manner has prevailed of late in which every other word seems to be underscored as in a school-girl's letter. The poet seems intent on showing his sinew, as if the power of the slim Apollo lay in the girth of his biceps. Force for the mere sake of force ends like Milo, caught and held mockingly fast by the recoil of the log he undertook to rive. In the race of fame, there are a score capable of brilliant *spurts* for one who comes in winner after a steady pull with wind and muscle to spare. Chaucer never shows any signs of effort, and it is a main proof of his excellence that he can be so inadequately sampled by detached passages, — by single lines taken away from the connection in which they contribute to the general effect. He has that continuity of thought, that evenly prolonged power, and that delightful equanimity, which characterize the higher orders of mind. There is something in him of the disinterestedness that made the Greeks masters in art. His phrase is never importunate. His sim-

plicity is that of elegance, not of poverty. The quiet unconcern with which he says his best things is peculiar to him among English poets, though Goldsmith, Addison, and Thackeray have approached it in prose. He prattles inadvertently away, and all the while, like the princess in the story, lets fall a pearl at every other word. It is such a piece of good luck to be natural! It is the good gift which the fairy godmother brings to her prime favorites in the cradle. If not genius, it alone is what makes genius amiable in the arts. If a man have it not, he will never find it, for when it is sought it is gone.

When Chaucer describes anything, it is commonly by one of those simple and obvious epithets or qualities that are so easy to miss. Is it a woman? He tells us she is *fresh;* that she has *glad* eyes; that "every day her beauty newed"; that

> "Methought all fellowship as naked
> Withouten her that I saw once,
> As a corône without the stones."

Sometimes he describes amply by the merest hint, as where the Friar, before setting himself softly down, drives away the cat. We know without need of more words that he has chosen the snuggest corner. In some of his early poems he sometimes, it is true, falls into the catalogue style of his contemporaries; but after he had found his genius he never particularizes too much, — a process as deadly to all effect as an explanation to a pun. The first stanza of the "Clerk's Tale" gives us a landscape whose stately choice of objects shows

a skill in composition worthy of Claude, the last artist who painted nature epically: —

> "There is at the west endë of Itaile,
> Down at the foot of Vesulus the cold,
> A lusty plain abundant of vitaile,
> Where many a tower and town thou may'st behold
> That founded were in time of fathers old,
> And many another delítable sight;
> And Sàlucës this noble country hight."

The Pre-Raphaelite style of landscape entangles the eye among the obtrusive weeds and grass-blades of the foreground which, in looking at a real bit of scenery, we overlook; but what a sweep of vision is here! and what happy generalization in the sixth verse as the poet turns away to the business of his story! The whole is full of open air.

But it is in his characters, especially, that his manner is large and free; for he is painting history, though with the fidelity of portrait. He brings out strongly the essential traits, characteristic of the genus rather than of the individual. The Merchant who keeps so steady a countenance that

> "There wist no wight that he was e'er in debt,"

the Sergeant at Law, "who seemëd busier than he was," the Doctor of Medicine, whose "study was but little on the Bible," — in all these cases it is the type and not the personage that fixes his attention. William Blake says truly, though he expresses his meaning somewhat clumsily, "the characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations. Some of the names and titles are altered by time, but the

characters remain forever unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies and lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps. Names alter, things never alter. As Newton numbered the stars, and as Linnæus numbered the plants, so Chaucer numbered the classes of men." In his outside accessaries, it is true, he sometimes seems as minute as if he were illuminating a missal. Nothing escapes his sure eye for the picturesque, — the cut of the beard, the soil of armor on the buff jerkin, the rust on the sword, the expression of the eye. But in this he has an artistic purpose. It is here that he individualizes, and, while every touch harmonizes with and seems to complete the moral features of the character, makes us feel that we are among living men, and not the abstracted images of men. Crabbe adds particular to particular, scattering rather than deepening the impression of reality, and making us feel as if every man were a species by himself; but Chaucer, never forgetting the essential sameness of human nature, makes it possible, and even probable, that his motley characters should meet on a common footing, while he gives to each the *expression* that belongs to him, the result of special circumstance or training. Indeed, the absence of any suggestion of *caste* cannot fail to strike any reader familiar with the literature on which he is supposed to have formed himself. No characters are at once so broadly human and so definitely outlined as his. Belonging, some of them, to extinct types, they continue contemporary and familiar forever.

So wide is the difference between knowing a great many men and that knowledge of human nature which comes of sympathetic insight and not of observation alone.

It is this power of sympathy which makes Chaucer's satire so kindly, — more so, one is tempted to say, than the panegyric of Pope. Intellectual satire gets its force from personal or moral antipathy, and measures offences by some rigid conventional standard. Its mouth waters over a galling word, and it loves to say *Thou*, pointing out its victim to public scorn. *Indignatio facit versus*, it boasts, though they might as often be fathered on envy or hatred. But imaginative satire, warmed through and through with the genial leaven of humor, smiles half sadly and murmurs *We*. Chaucer either makes one knave betray another, through a natural jealousy of competition, or else expose himself with a *naïveté* of good-humored cynicism which amuses rather than disgusts. In the former case the butt has a kind of claim on our sympathy; in the latter, it seems nothing strange, as I have already said, if the sunny atmosphere which floods that road to Canterbury should tempt anybody to throw off one disguise after another without suspicion. With perfect tact, too, the Host is made the *choragus* in this diverse company, and the coarse jollity of his temperament explains, if it do not excuse, much that would otherwise seem out of keeping. Surely nobody need have any scruples with *him*.

Chaucer seems to me to have been one of the most purely original of poets, as much so in respect

of the world that is about us as Dante in respect of that which is within us. There had been nothing like him before, there has been nothing since. He is original, not in the sense that he thinks and says what nobody ever thought and said before, and what nobody can ever think and say again, but because he is always natural, because, if not always absolutely new, he is always delightfully fresh, because he sets before us the world as it honestly appeared to Geoffrey Chaucer, and not a world as it seemed proper to certain people that it ought to appear. He found that the poetry which had preceded him had been first the expression of individual feeling, then of class feeling as the vehicle of legend and history, and at last had wellnigh lost itself in chasing the mirage of allegory. Literature seemed to have passed through the natural stages which at regular intervals bring it to decline. Even the lyrics of the *jongleurs* were all run in one mould, and the Pastourelles of Northern France had become as artificial as the Pastorals of Pope. The Romances of chivalry had been made over into prose, and the *Melusine* of his contemporary Jehan d'Arras is the forlorn hope of the modern novel. Arrived thus far in their decrepitude, the monks endeavored to give them a religious and moral turn by allegorizing them. Their process reminds one of something Ulloa tells us of the fashion in which the Spaniards converted the Mexicans: "Here we found an old man in a cavern so extremely aged as it was wonderful, which could neither see nor go because he was so

lame and crooked. The Father, Friar Raimund, said it were good (seeing he was so aged) to make him a Christian; whereupon we baptized him." The monks found the Romances in the same stage of senility, and gave them a saving sprinkle with the holy water of allegory. Perhaps they were only trying to turn the enemy's own weapons against himself, for it was the free-thinking "Romance of the Rose" that more than anything else had made allegory fashionable. Plutarch tells us that an allegory is to say one thing where another is meant, and this might have been needful for the personal security of Jean de Meung, as afterwards for that of his successor, Rabelais. But, except as a means of evading the fagot, the method has few recommendations. It reverses the true office of poetry by making the real unreal. It is imagination endeavoring to recommend itself to the understanding by means of cuts. If an author be in such deadly earnest, or if his imagination be of such creative vigor as to project real figures when it meant to cast only a shadow upon vapor; if the true spirit come, at once obsequious and terrible, when the conjurer has drawn his circle and gone through with his incantations merely to produce a proper frame of mind in his audience, as was the case with Dante, there is no longer any question of allegory as the word and thing are commonly understood. But with all secondary poets, as with Spenser for example, the allegory does not become of one substance with the poetry, but is a kind of carven frame for it, whose figures lose their mean

ing, as they cease to be contemporary. It was not a style that could have much attraction for a nature so sensitive to the actual, so observant of it, so interested by it, as that of Chaucer. He seems to have tried his hand at all the forms in vogue, and to have arrived in his old age at the truth, essential to all really great poetry, that his own instincts were his safest guides, that there is nothing deeper in life than life itself, and that to conjure an allegorical significance into it was to lose sight of its real meaning. He of all men could not say one thing and mean another, unless by way of humorous contrast.

In thus turning frankly and gayly to the actual world, and drinking inspiration from sources open to all; in turning away from a colorless abstraction to the solid earth and to emotions common to every pulse; in discovering that to make the best of nature, and not to grope vaguely after something better than nature, was the true office of Art; in insisting on a definite purpose, on veracity, cheerfulness, and simplicity, Chaucer shows himself the true father and founder of what is characteristically *English* literature. He has a hatred of cant as hearty as Dr. Johnson's, though he has a slier way of showing it; he has the placid common. sense of Franklin, the sweet, grave humor of Addison, the exquisite taste of Gray; but the whole texture of his mind, though its substance seem plain and grave, shows itself at every turn iridescent with poetic feeling like shot silk. Above all, he has an eye for character that seems to have

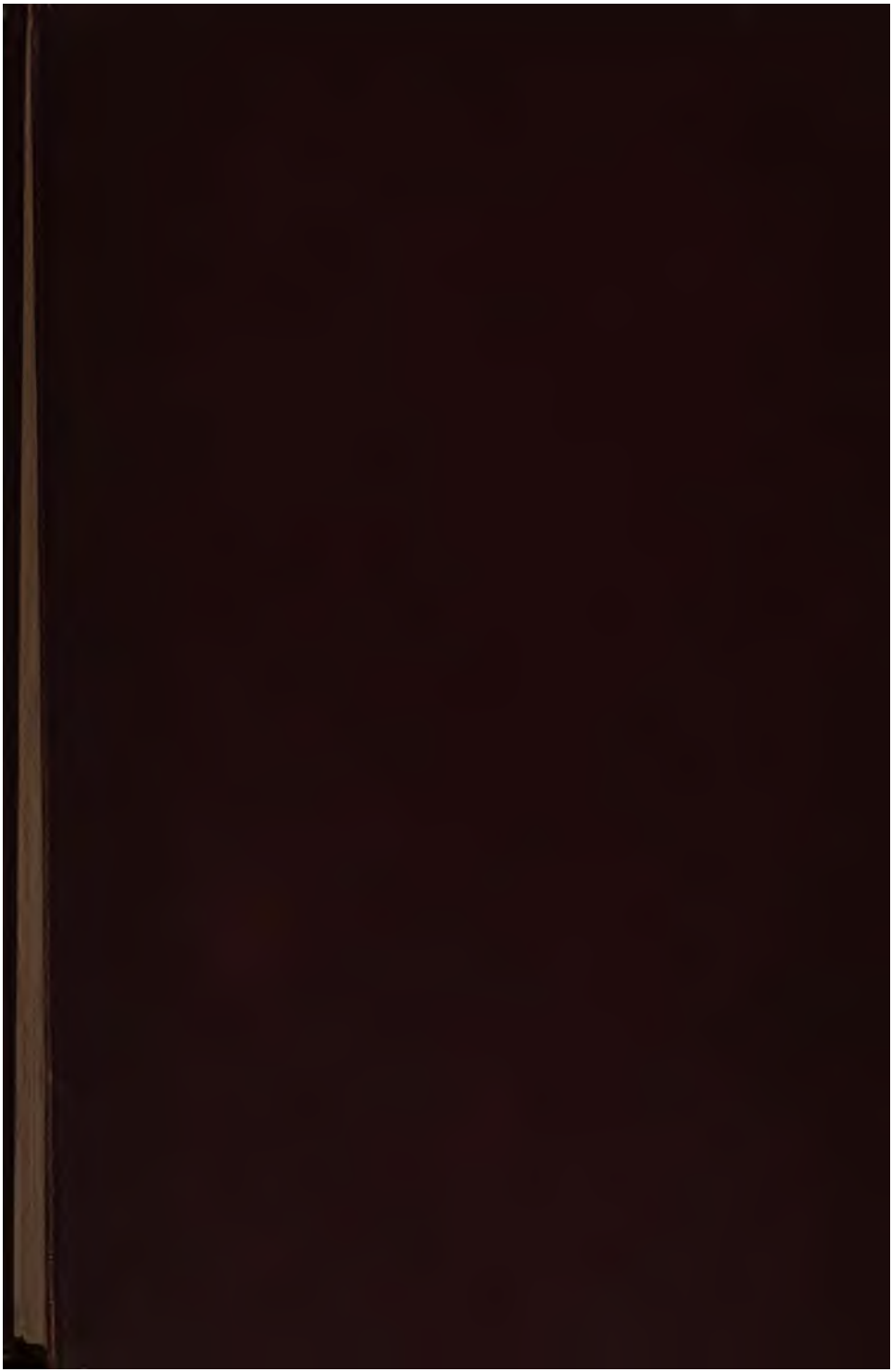
caught at once not only its mental and physical features, but even its expression in variety of costume, — an eye, indeed, second only, if it should be called second in some respects, to that of Shakespeare.

I know of nothing that may be compared with the prologue to the "Canterbury Tales," and with that to the story of the "Chanon's Yeoman" before Chaucer. Characters and portraits from real life had never been drawn with such discrimination, or with such variety, never with such bold precision of outline, and with such a lively sense of the picturesque. His Parson is still unmatched, though Dryden and Goldsmith have both tried their hands in emulation of him. And the humor also in its suavity, its perpetual presence and its shy unobtrusiveness, is something wholly new in literature. For anything that deserves to be called like it in English we must wait for Henry Fielding.

Chaucer is the first great poet who has treated To-day as if it were as good as Yesterday, the first who held up a mirror to contemporary life in its infinite variety of high and low, of humor and pathos. But he reflected life in its large sense as the life of *men*, from the knight to the ploughman, — the life of every day as it is made up of that curious compound of human nature with manners. The very form of the "Canterbury Tales" was imaginative. The garden of Boccaccio, the supper-party of Grazzini, and the voyage of Giraldi make a good enough thread for their stories, but exclude all save equals and friends, exclude consequently

human nature in its wider meaning. But by choosing a pilgrimage, Chaucer puts us on a plane where all men are equal, with souls to be saved, and with another world in view that abolishes all distinctions. By this choice, and by making the Host of the Tabard always the central figure, he has happily united the two most familiar emblems of life, — the short journey and the inn. We find more and more as we study him that he rises quietly from the conventional to the universal, and may fairly take his place with Homer in virtue of the breadth of his humanity.

In spite of some external stains, which those who have studied the influence of manners will easily account for without imputing them to any moral depravity, we feel that we can join the pure-minded Spenser in calling him "most sacred, happy spirit." If character may be divined from works, he was a good man, genial, sincere, hearty, temperate of mind, more wise, perhaps, for this world than the next, but thoroughly humane, and friendly with God and men. I know not how to sum up what we feel about him better than by saying (what would have pleased most one who was indifferent to fame) that we love him more even than we admire. We are sure that here was a true brother-man so kindly that, in his "House of Fame," after naming the great poets, he throws in a pleasant word for the oaten-pipes

> "Of the little herd-grooms
> That keepen beasts among the brooms."

No better inscription can be written on the first